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COLL. U. M.
ART IN FICTION

392

*Left by Ed. Mackey
May 1894.*

SNAP



SHOTS.

A VOLUME

OF

SHORT STORIES,

BY

HELEN M. GRAHAM,

Author of "Guy Herndon."

**PENSIONE CONSTANTIN
VILLINO SOLFERINO
via Solferino N. 1
FIRENZE**

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An Italian Interdict.

An Italian Interdict.

CHAPTER I.

One fine Winter's day in Rome, the Eternal City as it is called, there was assembled a little party for the English custom of afternoon tea.

"Well, Florence," began Tony Mortimer, "has Celia been showing you the sights? Where have you been?"

"Everywhere," answered Florence, "although I suppose you fancied that without your valuable aid we would be irretrievably lost; nevertheless, as Celia will tell you, we fared very well."

The speaker was petite, with a certain piquancy and freshness to which was added now a supreme disdain.

"Cruel as always," answered Tony. "I expected as much. You have grown very contemptuous and very disdainful of late; why is it?"

"Blame the world for it, not me; one grows so always, I fancy, after one has been several years in the vortex. There is nothing like it for grinding down the sharp edges of one's character."

"Florence," here interrupted Celia, "you must stay with us for the Carnival. Surely that is the one time of all others to be in Rome."

"Thank you, Celia ; but I fear you will be tired of me by that time, besides I do not know how long mamma and Bertie intend remaining. I must return to America with them, you know."

"And how soon will that be ?"

"It depends upon Bertie's health. Mamma wants to see a marked improvement in him before returning."

"Well, I don't want to quarrel with your little brother, for it is owing to him that we have you at all, but I am sure we shall be delighted to have you stay, shall we we not Alessandro ?"

Her husband thus appealed to, smiled pleasantly.

"I should be only too happy," he answered, in broken English.

"There goes Adrian !" exclaimed Tony, who, during this conversation, had been looking out of the window. "I had no idea he had returned so soon."

"Who is Adrian ?" asked Florence, with her slow air of disdain.

"Adrian Mancici, Duke de Colonna."

"That man a Duke !" she exclaimed, as looking out she saw a tall, well-built man, about Tony's own age, in a shabby velveteen coat ; "impossible !"

"True, nevertheless," answered Tony. "Poor and proud like most of his race ; ha ! he sees us now and is looking up."

Florence, veiled behind the curtain, saw his upturned face, and something of the pathos of it—though he was smiling now—in the large dark eyes and delicate contour, struck home to her, and in a moment she was off her guard.

“How handsome he is!” she exclaimed, as he disappeared with a wave of his hand.

“You think so?” said Tony, bitterly. “Women are all alike; they jump at a title like a fish at a hook, and often get caught, too, for that matter.”

“I have no desire for a title; we Americans are too independent to care for a paltry thing like that,” she answered, with flaming cheeks.

She had sat down to her embroidery, but a certain annoyance at having betrayed herself made her fingers clumsy. Her silk knotted and her needle broke. Proud and high-spirited as she was, and contemptuous of light, every-day matters, there was a well of deep feeling at her heart which was not for every one—her pride, her irony kept it concealed; but to those who could reach deep enough it was rich as it was deep.

After dinner, as they were sitting in the garden under the orange trees, the Duke de Colonna suddenly stood before them.

“Good evening, Signora,” he said to Celia. “My friend Tony, here,” laying a hand on his shoulder, “has spoiled me, and when I want him I come right in.”

“That is right, Adrian; you are always welcome,” answered Celia. “But you have not met

my guest, Miss Harrington. She is an old school-friend of mine."

Adrian bowed, but before he could speak Tony broke in.

"How long have you been in Rome—when did you get back?"

"Only this morning. Ah! how good Rome is after one has been away for any length of time."

"What a true Roman you are!" said Celia.

"Certainly; why not?" he answered, smiling. I think it would take a great deal to equal Rome, either in her grandeur as she is to foreigners, or in her beauty as she is to us Romans."

"How you champion her!" laughed Celia. "I hope some time you will love a woman as ardently as you love Rome at present."

"She has been a good mother to me," he answered. "I only give her my poor gratitude."

Florence had been silent, listening to the conversation. Now Adrian turned to her and, with a slight flush born of diffidence, said:

"Why are you silent, Miss Harrington? Are you not an admirer of Rome?"

"I can hardly say," she answered calmly. "I have been here so little and have seen less."

"Why, Florence," exclaimed Celia, "you have been everywhere—St. Peter's, Arch of Titus, and Patrian—all over!"

"I do not call that either seeing or knowing a city," answered Florence. "Can you know a woman by the jewels she wears?"

"Miss Harrington is right," said Adrian. "The

greatest time to really see Rome is during the Carnival."

"If you can persuade Miss Harrington to stay to that," said Celia, "you can do what Alessandro, Tony and I have failed to do."

"Then I am afraid I can do but little," said Adrian, rising. "What are you painting now, Tony?"

"I have two or three pictures under way; can you come in and see them?"

"Not to-night; it is late. Some other time."

"To-morrow, then?"

"Yes, to-morrow. Good-night."

"Poor fellow," said Celia when he was gone, "how can he manage to live from day to day, as he does, in boundless magnificence yet suffering for bread! It is the Italian system, and no one complains."

"Is he really so poor?" asked Florence. "I thought he was titled."

"So he is, my dear; but a title can not buy the necessities of life."

CHAPTER II.

The next morning Celia was with her brother in the studio, and, as he diligently plied his brushes, she pursued an animated conversation.

"Tony," she began, "why don't you interest yourself more in Florence? She has been here a whole week, and I do not believe she cares one bit more for you than she did when she first came."

"I don't believe she does," he answered, hopelessly.

"Why don't you make her, then?"

"How? Everything I say she turns off into irony."

"What fools men are," said his sister contemptuously; "you have not begun in the right way. I am exceedingly anxious to see you well settled in life, and Florence is charming. Besides, she is enormously rich. Her father left her a fortune independently; he was a very wealthy man, and there is only her mother and her little brother. That is why she is so independent in her ways and so outspoken, just like a man, for with her money she can marry anybody."

"I am afraid she could never care for me."

"Make her,"

“How?”

“Why, there are a thousand little ways of showing her attention, and I am willing to help you all I can. It will take time and patience, and having her right here in the house is a great auxiliary.”

“I will do my utmost; I think she does not altogether dislike me.”

“It is plain sailing. You have an open sea, favorable wind, no one else in sight; you have only to steer correctly, bear down upon her, and open fire.”

“I am inclined to think, my dear Celia, you could do all that kind of thing better than I.”

“Nonsense, show some spirit. Remember, ‘faint heart ne’er won fair lady’; go in and win.”

She was silent after that, and Tony continued to ply his brushes; but the conversation made more of an impression on him than she knew, and he determined to begin again on a new plan.

Meanwhile, Florence, the object of their conversation, was in the garden with a book she did not read. As she raised her eyes she saw the Duke approaching her. Involuntarily she rose.

“You are out early,” were his first words as he joined her.

“Not more so than usual,” was her reply. “I think the air here tempts one in spite of one’s self.”

“Then you like Italy, do you not?”

“What I have seen of it, yes. It seems to me to be filled with the very nicest of everything—beautiful sky, lovely flowers, a perfect climate—what more could you have?”

“And how about the people themselves—are they included in your list?”

“Do you think so?” She was looking at him archly as she spoke.

“I hope so?” he returned.

She rose reluctantly.

“How the time has flown! Celia will wonder what has become of me; I must go to the studio. Come!”

She said this in a tone of command, and the Duke gladly followed her. They entered the studio together.

Tony looked surprised when he saw them, but Florence seemed in the highest spirits.

“You call yourself an artist, Tony, and yet you work indoors on a day like this!” she exclaimed; “that is a contradiction I do not quite understand.”

“We live to learn, you know; besides, as we have not tried out of doors we are satisfied here for a time.”

“At least it is cooler,” said Celia.

“Sour grapes!” said Florence. “You both ought to pose for Content; it would become you very well.”

“You are always saying such nice, complimentary things about me, Florence,” said Tony, “I feel highly honored, I assure you. Adrian,” he continued, turning to his friend, “you come just at the right time. I want you to pose for me.”

“Pose for you! I could not do it.”

“Oh, yes. I want a figure, sort of reclining—an

Eastern Chief in his tent. You never refused before; what is the reason you do so now?"

"Well, if you insist," he began, ungraciously, "I have nothing more to say."

"I wish I could paint," began Tony, petulantly. "I wish you could tell me the secret of it, Adrian. Oh, those glorious pictures in your gallery! You should see them, Florence, such Angelo's, such Raphael's, and every one worth a king's ransom."

"Is this so?" began Florence. "Will you show them to me?"

"Perhaps, some time," said Adrian, slowly.

"They are famous the world over," said Celia. "Have you never heard, my dear, of the great Colonna gallery?"

"And is all this yours?" Florence asked, turning to him.

"All mine," he said, with a deep sigh.

There was a long silence, during which Tony painted steadily.

That same evening they were seated on the balcony, and Florence was watching the stars come out one by one, when the Duke joined her.

"What a perfect night!" she said. "Could anything be better?"

"Would you like to come down to the garden?" he asked, eagerly. "We can see the moon rise there much better."

"Yes, I will go," she answered, in her cold, measured tones; and he caught up her wrap of sheer priceless lace and threw it about her shoulders.

They walked for some time in silence. Florence seemed absorbed in her thoughts and Adrian watched her beautiful, immobile face, happy that he was by her side.

They came to a fountain, and she seated herself on a stone bench, under a broken statue. Then she turned her clear, tranquil eyes upon him.

"This is like a 'Midsummer Night's Dream,'" she said. "It is such a night as one might read of. You do not feel it as I do ; why not ?"

"Perhaps because I am used to it. Custom stales, they say, though I love it nevertheless."

There was silence for a time, and when she spoke again it was in a different tone.

"Tell me something of yourself ; what have you been ?"

"There is nothing much to tell. I have been always as I am now."

"Your face tells me better than your tongue."

"What has it betrayed ?" he said, smiling.

"That you have not always been like this ; perhaps once your people were mighty, you yourself were rich and powerful. Am I not right ?"

"I have never been other than I am," he began, in a low, sad voice, "as for my people, the Colonna in olden time were the great family here, they ruled almost absolute as kings. We were then very rich and very powerful."

"What caused the change," she asked.

"A thousand and one things. The times, the politics, the age, and when a house begins to totter the downfall is precipitate, everything hastens

it. They lived on in the grand old palace, fighting, feasting, flourishing, without a thought of anything else until my grandfather's time. He found it on the brink of ruin, with bankruptcy staring him in the face. But he kept on just the same, spending more than he could account for, keeping up the almost feudal customs till his death.

"My poor father! with him it was different. His life was a hard, bitter struggle, that ultimately crushed him, and he died a worn out old man, at forty."

"And you have no one?"

"No one. I am the last, and the race will die with me. Father, mother, brothers and sisters have all gone, followed the fortune, and I stand alone in the midst of my ruined heritage bearing the fallen fortunes of the house of Colonna."

When he stopped, Florence rose and stretched her hands out to him. She was pale, and the tears welled up in her eyes and fell in great drops on her cheeks.

"Thank you so much for telling me all this, I feel already as if I knew you better, I do not think that their power is quite gone yet. 'Who best bears his mild yoke they serve Him best,' remember that. But it is growing very late and I must return; I had forgotten the time entirely."

They walked back to the house together.

"I will not enter, it is too late," said Adrian, "make my excuses to them and tell them I will come some other time."

The young girl turned to bid him good-night and stood for a moment in the door-way—the moon-light falling softly on her slender form and face that was replete with feeling and tenderness—then fluttered into the shadowy house.

Adrian stood looking after her for some moments, wondering what she had meant by saying, “their power not all gone yet,” then wandered back again and stood beneath the shattered statue of the Hope. Was it an omen?

CHAPTER III.

It was a glorious day, the sunshine was flooding the land and touching everything it came in contact with into pure gold, as a carriage passed into the more unfrequented thoroughfares. It was a party consisting of Celia, Florence, Tony and Adrian, on their way to the ruins of the famous Baths of Caracalla.

"How the beggars do persecute us to-day," said Celia, "I never knew them to be so persistent."

"The two extremes," said Tony, pointing, "here the palaces—there the beggars."

"In this case the beggars overshadow the palaces," said his sister.

"A curious amalgamation of nature," said Tony, "Italian to the core. What are you thinking of, Florence? You are so silent."

"I was thinking how different it all was from America, here you have the two extremes, as Celia said, there all is equal."

"Is America so different then?" asked Adrian, looking up.

"As different as a kingdom can be from a republic."

"And which is preferable?"

"It depends entirely upon the person. Now Tony, for instance, should prefer this, from his artistic standpoint."

"On the contrary," said Tony, "I am patriotic enough to prefer America."

"Tony you are like the man in the fable, who got everything by wishing for it and nothing pleased him, they all came too easily."

"I don't get everything easily at all," said Tony, "I am afraid Florence is growing too satirical by far."

"Do you despise satire? I do not, I think it is an excellent weapon well used, but like the surgeon's knife, cuts and gashes terribly when used by an inexperienced hand. It strikes at the worst in everything."

"Your metaphor is excellent, Mademoiselle, I compliment you for it," replied Tony, "and bow before your superior intellect."

"Coming from you it is a compliment indeed, Signor Antonio."

"What nonsense," said Celia, "you both talk like a drawing-room society play."

"Florence, like every right-minded woman, must have the last word," said Tony. "Oh, Superior Being," he continued, "why do you not advocate woman's rights?"

"So I do though not as interpreted by the world. I want woman's rights only, not man's rights usurped by woman."

The carriage stopped here and they descended.

"Have I shocked you?" asked Florence, smiling

at Adrian who was helping her descend. "Do the women of your country argue on these subjects?"

"If they did I think it would be better for them," was the reply.

The ruins were magnificent, the soft balmy Italian air, the sunshine and the blue sky, pervaded everything.

"Look, Tony, there are the Blounts," exclaimed Celia, suddenly, "don't you remember Grace, that tall girl we met in London last year?"

"Why so it is, upon my word," answered Tony, "and looking prettier than ever."

Brother and sister hurried forward to greet their new found friends, and soon they were all chattering together to the exclusion of everything else.

"What a day for perfect happiness," exclaimed Florence as she and Adrian were left together. "Show me all the ruins and tell me all about them."

Slowly they went from stone to stone and Florence was pleased and awed, and at last tiring of it seated herself on a huge rock in the shade.

"How different were the lives of these men who lived here so long ago from ours who are here to-day," she said.

"And yet perhaps they were as happy in their own way," answered Adrian, as he lay stretched on the grass at her feet.

"They say it is part of one's self not one's surroundings," she said, "how different the idea of happiness is to different people. Ask the poet, the anchorite, the king, the slave, and they will all have something different."

"What is your idea of it, Miss Harrington?"

"I could not explain it," she answered, "but to-day I feel perfectly happy, it may be the air, it may be the glorious climate, it may be these ruins or all three together, and perhaps more, I don't know and I don't care to analyze it, let it suffice that I am so."

"Sometimes it makes one sad to see ruins such as these, it makes one wish one could do something or be something greater than other men."

"Have you felt so?"

"I feel so often."

"Then you should succeed; remember that greatness does not come for the wishing."

"Is anything as fickle as fortune" asked Adrian, "think of how many enter the race and how few reach the goal."

"If all that entered succeeded the victor would not be appreciated; it is only when we have failed ourselves that we see and appreciate the greatness of others."

Here they were interrupted by Tony.

"Where have you been?" he exclaimed, "I was looking everywhere."

"Just where you see us," answered Adrian.

"Have your English friends gone?"

"They are at Rome where they are stopping for the Carnival."

"It is time we were returning," said Florence, rising reluctantly, "Celia will be looking for us."

"Come this way," said Tony.

They were at a plank almost perpendicular, Florence hesitated.

"I cannot go down there," she said, "it makes me feel giddy even to look at it."

"Give me your hand," said Tony, "and I will help you."

Florence hesitated still and almost involuntarily looked at the Duke.

He instantly stepped forward.

"Let me help you," he said, "have no fear, you will be as safe as on solid ground."

She put her hand in his and Tony felt jealous, the first pang he had ever felt.

Florence soon gained the ground in safety and they joined Celia, who was seated in the carriage waiting for them.

"How long you have been," she cried, "we could not imagine what had become of you."

The drive home was without incident, Celia talking brightly to Adrian all the way, while Florence sat as one in a dream, even forgetting to answer Tony's sallies with her usual spirit.

CHAPTER IV.

Adrian was in his own rooms of the palace—stretched full length on a divan, when Giovanni, once his steward, now valet, butler and general manager, came to him.

“We are at a low ebb to-day, my lord, the fare must be scanty, but as it is, what do you prefer?”

“Anything,” answered the Duke absently.

“Santa Maria! you must have some choice, to think of a Duke of Colonna coming to this, barely keeping soul and body together, is shameful.”

“I have told you over and over again, Giovanni, that you had better take a good place, you are old and need all the little comforts that I cannot give you, I have done all I could to get you out comfortably, you must now look forward to being starved out.”

“Do you think I could ever leave you of my own accord, caro maestro?” he said, as he laid his hand reverentially on the young man’s head, “no, no, to eat a crust here by your side is better to me than a feast of kings.”

“Perhaps we shall not have even the crust always,” answered the Duke, sadly. “But,

Giovanni, listen to me, I expect company this evening, what can you give them ? ”

“Corpo de Bacco ! company, and things at this pass ; dinner, company ; ah ! caro maestro, if you were rich how your heart would delight in widespread hospitality, but Heaven help us, we have barely enough for ourselves.”

“While there is a Colonna living, their doors will be open to guests,” answered the Duke proudly, “that is their right.”

“But we can do nothing without money.”

“Sell something then.”

“We have nothing, everything of any value has gone long ago, ah ! caro maestro ! can you never feel that you are poor ? ”

“I feel it only too well,” answered Adrian, a quick flush of annoyance passing over his face. He arose and paced the room.

Giovanni watched him narrowly.

“If it is only a party of young fellows, I think we could borrow from Rinaldo over the way, enough to make out with.”

“The silver candlesticks ? ” exclaimed Adrian, getting them down with feverish haste. “I had entirely forgotten them. Giovanni take these and see what they will bring.”

“Santa Maria ! they have been in the family for so many years, I could not sell those to save my soul.”

“Do you refuse ? Then I will take them myself.”

“The Duke of Colonna at a pawn shop, never, I

will take them at once. Oh, that I had ever lived to see the day we parted from the silver candlesticks."

"One moment, Giovanni," and the Duke threw himself again on the couch, "I expect ladies, this is to be no ordinary feast, I wish everything to be the very best you can procure, spare no pains and with the candlesticks there will be no trouble."

"Eat the candlesticks at one meal? Impossible, why think of what we shall do afterwards."

"I care not if we starve afterwards, but for this one day only I wish a feast fit for the gods. Spare nothing, and, Giovanni, open one of those bottles of old wine we have in the cellar."

"The Colonna wine! the gift of your grandfather from the French king! oh, don't open that, some other kind will do just as well."

"I will have that and no other, go now, Giovanni, leave me, I wish to be alone."

As the dinner hour approached the little party arrived, consisting of Celia and her husband, Tony and Florence.

The Duke, who stood looking for them, descended the steps bareheaded and after greeting the others turned to Florence.

"I am so happy to welcome you here, Miss Harrington," he said, bowing gravely, "let me escort you to my house."

He looked so handsome and winning as he stood there in the sunlight welcoming his guests, that Florence's eyes strayed to his face and rested there.

"How charming everything is," she said, when

they found themselves inside, "you have been almost selfish to keep it to yourself so long."

She looked around her as she spoke, a gay, careless, happy girl, and as the Duke bent over her he felt a wild tumultuous feeling overpowering him.

She wore a bunch of narcissus and their freshness and odor seemed to pervade everything.

When the meal was announced they found the table the perfection of taste.

"My dear Adrian you have given us a most pleasant surprise," began Celia, "who would have thought you could have done everything so well."

"But when shall we see the pictures?" said Florence.

"Afterwards," answered Adrian. "We will take everything by turns."

"You must be lonesome here sometimes," said Celia.

"Oh no," he answered, "when I am lonesome I go out and when I am tired it looks pleasant here."

"How very philosophical," said Tony, who was by Florence.

"You are very lucky not to be discontented," said Florence, turning to Adrian.

"Oh I don't know, I think I could be happy anywhere if I lived like this, free as air. I might only have one room and that at the top of a house and it might have its compensations. Besides I would still be in Rome what would it matter after all?"

"But would you be as happy?" asked Florence.

"Why not? We have only one life to live, so I

think we are allowed to make that as pleasant as possible."

"Where do you get such good wine?" said Alessandro, "I have tried all over Italy and cannot find anything to compare with it."

"It was some I had, I think myself it is very good."

"Very good! it is admirable, delicious."

"Miss Harrington," said Adrian, turning to Florence as they rose, "your patience is about to be rewarded, my pictures are here."

He threw open a huge door and Florence found herself in an immense space, the walls literally papered with paintings.

"Are they all yours?" she stammered at last.

"All," he answered, smiling, "do you think there are so many?"

"Many, it would take a lifetime to collect them all. You should never want for anything while you have these."

"One cannot live altogether on pictures," he said.

"Let us begin at the beginning. If I were an artist I should never wish to paint again after seeing these masterpieces."

"But seeing these emulates others to do likewise."

"I should think you would feel almost tempted to sell some of them, there are so many they must be almost priceless."

"The last two that I sold supported me for over a year, but I can never sell any more now."

"It is hard to part with them, I know," she said.

"It is not that. Italy has passed a law that no works of art shall pass out of the country. This gallery has been open to the public for years, in fact the Colonna gallery is known all over Europe."

"But could you not sell them to some rich person who lives in Italy?"

"That would be allowable. It is not that they must not be sold as it is they must not leave the country."

"I think that is an unjust law."

"It is a law that you Americans would understand, because it is to benefit the people. Shall we go on the terrace?"

"One moment. I feel as if I could scarcely tear myself away from here."

"And yet outside there is a glorious sunset."

"One can see a sunset every day, but paintings such as these only once in a lifetime. They are grand. Come, I am ready now."

When they gained the terrace the sun had set and only a glorious radiance filled the sky.

"Is not this better than any picture?" asked the Duke.

"Ah, how much better. After all Art in every sense is only a copy after Nature."

They joined the others and soon the hour came for them to return.

"Have you enjoyed it in the least," asked the Duke anxiously, of Florence, as he was helping her with her wrap.

“Enjoyed it ! It has been one of the pleasantest days of my life,” she answered warmly.

When they were gone Adrian wandered aimlessly from room to room, feeling over again the fascination and power she exercised over him, till by degrees the whole palace seemed sanctified by her presence.

CHAPTER V.

The soft Italian day was drawing to a close when Adrian, who was in his palace passing an idle hour, espied Tony from the window, and hurried to welcome him.

"I am glad to see you old fellow," he said, "it is a long time since you were here. But something is wrong, I see it in your face, what is it?"

"Something is very wrong," answered Tony, "that is why I came here. Adrian, do you think you have acted honorably to me."

"Honorably! why what do you mean? What have I done?"

"Done, you have been flirting desperately with Miss Harrington and turning her head with your soft charming manners. Do you deny this?"

"Was there any harm?"

"Harm, when I have been trying for so long to win her, do you think you were right to interfere? Celia invited her here especially for me, and everything was going on satisfactorily till you stepped in and spoiled it all."

"I cannot understand yet what I have done," said the Duke.

"Can't you see you are standing in my way?"

How can I make any headway when you are always monopolizing her? You are only amusing yourself, while I really care for her. Oh, Adrian how could you treat me so."

"Does she care for you?" asked the Duke, slowly.

"She would if you would only keep out of the way and give me the chance. Adrian, we have been friends so long, surely you will do this for me—just keep out of her way until all is settled."

"And would you value a love won like that?" asked the Duke with supreme scorn. "That is no love, if she cannot care for you enough now she never will; you cannot keep her forever shut away from other men. I think you are not sure enough of your own position in her regard if you fear rivals."

"Adrian, I have come here to-day to ask you to end this miserable flirtation. It means more to me than you can ever guess. She likes you, is interested in you, and I cannot deny that you are handsomer than most men and fascinating, and have a soft manner, and Heaven only knows what, but there is something about you that attracts women."

"About me! Tony you are exceedingly complimentary, I had no idea I was so attractive. Have you taken an inventory of all my charms?"

"You have not been my model for nothing. Promise me Adrian that you will leave the field open for me."

The Duke knitted his brow and paced up and down his room. Suddenly he paused.

“For how long am I to do this?”

“Until I can get it all settled.”

“I will do it then, Tony, but remember, you must make it as short as possible.”

“How can I thank you, Adrian,” said Tony, “you were my friend always and now more so than ever, since no woman can come between us.”

Tony left the palace very well satisfied with himself, but Adrian paced up and down restlessly, striving to control his emotions.

“Well, at any rate, if she cares enough for him to marry him I should be content; if she does not accept him there is still a chance for me.”

While this conversation had been taking place, Florence had taken Alessandro aside in the studio.

“I am going to ask you to do something for me,” she said, “and I hope you will not refuse me.”

“Refuse you, certainly not, what is it.”

“First of all, I must pledge you to secrecy.”

“A secret is it? Mustn’t I even tell Celia?”

“No, not even Celia. Are you ready?”

“Proceed.”

“I have been to see the Duke of Colonna’s paintings, I admire them greatly and I wish to buy one.”

“They are very expensive.”

“I care nothing for that. I will give you a check for any amount he names. Pick out the least valuable one and tell the Duke to name his price.”

“But, my dear young lady, those pictures can-

not leave Italy ; and, another thing, he could not sell them to you."

"I have thought of all that and my plans are made to carry them out ; you have only to do as I tell you. Go to the Duke, tell him a rich American wishes one of his pictures, you pick out the one the American is supposed to choose. Tell him it is to be sent here prior to your sending it away. My check will be drawn on my banker in London and he will never know that I am connected with it, that is, if you keep your word."

"That is easily done ; but have you realized how very much this will cost you ?"

"It matters little. Can you go soon ?"

"I will go at once ; but one more question. What are you to do with the picture when it arrives here ?"

"You will find that out all in good time."

"Then I will go, though I hope to be enlightened some time as my reward."

"What are you saying to my husband ?" asked Celia, putting her head in the doorway.

"Nothing of any importance," answered Florence, smiling. "It is a little secret between us two."

"Then I shall expect to know it very soon for they say that a woman can never keep a secret."

"That all depends," answered Florence, "though I think that most of our old time sayings are suffering a change now, the philosophers have not yet learned the old proverb :—'Let well enough

alone,' and sometimes upset some of our pet theories."

"That is so but it is the march of the times."

"But it has been proved that women can keep secrets better than men," said Florence. "Look at the Russian women, how they do."

"Yes, poor things, and what grief they come to, for my part I would rather be an American," said Celia, "after all we have the best time of it."

"I think none of us would be willing to return to the days of bondage. We have outgrown that; think of the old Bible times and the women in them."

"You were speaking rather slightly of philosophers just now, pray Miss Florence are you not one yourself?"

"On the contrary, I prefer to leave Nature as she is."

CHAPTER VI.

"Tony," said Florence, one day as they were leaving the breakfast table, "come with me into the studio."

"What is coming now?" he asked, as he followed her, completely mystified.

She did not answer, but gaining the studio she sat as if wrapped in thought.

"What have I done?" he asked, going over to where she sat, "have I offended you and are you going to scold me?"

"Scold you, no," she answered, "I have no right to take you to task."

"Won't you let me give you the right?" he asked.

"Don't talk that way now," she implored, "I will tell you what I brought you here for, it is to do me a very great favor. It is the first time I have ever asked anything of you."

"Tell me what it is then that I can do it at once."

Florence turned a picture around to the light.

"Have you ever seen this before, Tony?" she asked.

"One of the Colonna paintings ! how did it get here ?"

"It is mine, I have bought it."

"How will you ever get it out of Italy ?"

"That is where you are to help me."

"Me, I do not understand."

"It is very simple, listen. You are to paint a picture on a bit of canvas and then nail it on over this so that it will look like one of your own paintings."

"And if we are caught ?"

"We must take our chances, though they are ten to one we will not be caught."

"Does the Duke know of this ?"

"He has no need to know anything, only that he has sold his picture."

"Why are you doing this, Florence ? What is this picture to you except that it is Adrian's ? Why do you always think of him first ? Why have you bought his picture and not mine. Oh, Florence, this has truly hurt me."

"Don't be jealous, Tony, you are not in so much need as the Duke, besides, will you not help him ? He is your friend, you know."

"No, I will not touch that picture," exclaimed Tony, "till you tell me all there is between yourself and the Duke."

"There is nothing," she answered. "If I had thought you would have refused me so slight a thing I would have gone to some one else."

"Stay, one moment, Florence, you shall not go in anger, and rather than have you angry with me I

would do anything you wish. Hear me, Florence, and do not turn away. I have been so happy since you have been here, I cannot tell you all it has meant to me, and seeing you day by day I have learned to care for you very, very much. I love you Florence, it has been growing on me steadily till now it has almost mastered me. I love you and I want to ask you to become my wife."

Florence stood in the centre of the room, pale as death. The soft Italian breeze floated in laden with the scent of many flowers, but she did not heed it, she only shrank a little away from him.

"Oh, don't, Tony."

"Don't turn away from me, Florence, I think it would kill me now ; give me some promise, some hope that in time you will learn to care for me."

"It is impossible. Oh, Tony, I would have given worlds to have spared you this, but I can never be anything more to you than I am now."

"But perhaps, some time you will learn to like me better, we have always been such good friends."

"But friendship can never be love," answered Florence.

"And you would turn me away without a word, without a single word of sympathy when my whole life is wrapped up in you. To me the sun shines only for you, the earth goes round only for you, if you had ever loved you would understand all that you are to me."

"I can understand it only too well," she said sadly.

"Florence," he began, suddenly struck by the

hopeless look in her face, "is there anything between you and the Duke?"

"Why do you ask me that?"

"Because I have a right to know, if he has been playing against me; then I shall know what to do."

"Have no fear; the Duke would do nothing but what was most honorable."

"You speak warmly; perhaps you have a high regard for him?"

"I have."

"May I ask why?"

"Because in a most trying, mortifying and unpleasant position he bears himself most nobly."

"You seem to have studied him."

"I have only seen what no one could have helped seeing."

"Perhaps you are in love with him. Are you?"

"I do not think I am required to answer that question to you or to any one until he asks me himself."

"And if he never does."

"Then it will go unanswered."

"Oh, Florence, can't you change your mind?"

"I wish I could, for your sake, but it is impossible."

Heartbroken he turned to go, but his strong emotions conquered him, and he sank down on a couch and, burying his face in his hands, was convulsed with sobs.

Florence sprang to his side. During his love-scene she had remained cold and embarrassed, but

at this sign of evident distress it was too real not to appeal to her at once.

“Tony ! Tony ! don’t go on like that ! Try to bear it like a man. I am not worth your tears ; it grieves me terribly to see you like this. I never thought you cared so much.”

“You might have known I cared for you.”

“How should I ? We were always laughing and chaffing each other.”

“I might have known you never cared for me. I tried my very best, but have failed.”

“It is not your fault, Tony ; love cannot be forced. Some day you will marry some sweet, charming girl, and then you will forget all about me.”

“Never !”

“Oh, yes, you will. In the meantime don’t take it so much to heart. I am sincerely sorry. We shall go back to our old relations as very good friends. Do you agree ?”

“No,” he answered, “I do not want your friendship if I cannot have your love.”

“Very well ; you may refuse it now, but there will come a time when you will need and cherish it and not despise it as you do now.”

Then she left him, and he sat for a long time pondering on what she had said to him, till, rising to pace the room, the Colonna painting caught his eye. He pulled out several canvasses and set to work. The picture he was painting did not occupy much of his thoughts, but as he got it under way a new, quieter feeling stole over him, and when it

was finished he nailed it over the original till no one could have detected it.

Then the innocent painting, hiding this deceit, was sent out into the world and took its journey away from Rome, away from Italy, till it arrived at the steamer that was to take over to the new world the glory of the old masters.

CHAPTER VII.

And so the days went by one by one, quietly and swiftly till the day of the great March Gras arrived.

Florence, who had been so reluctant to stay, was persuaded by Celia to wait a week longer.

On the morning of the great fete they left the house early in a body.

Celia saw at once that there was something between Tony and Florence, for beyond the usual courtesies they mutually ignored each other. It worried her a good deal to see it, and she spoke to her husband about it, but he only said: "Leave them alone, Celia, it is the better way. If they have quarrelled they will soon make up, and young lovers' feelings are not to be forced."

"I hope it will come right in time," answered his wife, "but my mind misgives me, I hope she has not refused him."

When they gained the street, the greatest confusion reigned, and it was with the utmost difficulty that they forced their way through the motley crowd to the stand where they were to see the procession.

The streets were full of action. Flags fluttered.

it rained flowers and confetti, the air was filled with music.

And the people ! no other place in the universe could boast such a sight. Men and women, in every style and fashion, elbowed each other with carnival good nature, while the merry making, and buffoonery was unlimited. One would almost suppose that reason and order had left the city and that confusion and pandemonium reigned in their stead.

Florence saw it all and was watching it with breathless interest when some one behind her touched her and she looked around.

“Can you be interested in Carnivals,” said the speaker, addressing her, “I lost my taste for them years ago.”

Florence was frightened. She had never seen the speaker before but fancied that during a carnival it was customary to speak to everyone. She turned slightly towards him without raising her eyes from the crowd.

“Why are you so cold to me ?” the stranger continued, “Italy seems to have chilled your heart.”

“Sir,” said Florence, “your attentions annoy me, pray cease them. I think you have made some mistake.”

“Don’t be hard on me,” he pleaded, “we Americans should stand by one another in a foreign land, but here comes the procession, they say the Duke of Colonna will make a divine Rex.”

"The Duke of Colonna !" exclaimed Florence, "surely you are mistaken."

But no, the procession came in view and the Duke, dressed as one of the once powerful Colonna, was seated on a dias a woman of surpassing loveliness by his side. The flowers and confetti rained in showers over them and Florence in her excitement rose to her feet.

As the procession passed by where she sat, the Duke turned towards her and two superb Italian roses fell at her feet. She stooped to pick them up with a face radiantly happy, and turned her eyes towards him, but the procession was advancing rapidly and the Duke and his fair companion were already far out of sight.

"Where are they going?" asked Florence.

"To the City Hall, to the ball, to the devil," answered her companion. "You are going to the ball, of course?"

"I cannot tell," she answered, as she turned away.

"I shall look for you and shall know you through any disguise!"

The crowd was growing turbulent and Florence, seeing in the distance her party rising, rose too.

"Don't forget!" whispered her strange companion. "Why do you cringe from me that way? I would not harm you."

Without heeding him, Florence turned away, and soon she and Celia were dressing for the ball.

They were to be exactly alike, dressed in domi-

nos, though Florence wore her cherished white roses.

The ball was at its height when they arrived and Florence, after taking a turn with Alessandro, was resting, leaning against the wall, when the Duke approached her. He was dressed in crimson, slashed with white, while a circlet of gold rested on his brow.

"You got my roses then?" were his first words. "How late you are, I thought you would never come."

"Good evening, Rectus Publius, I hardly knew you in your new role; what do you rule?"

"The passing show, this is my kingdom erstwhile. What do you think of our Carnival?"

"I think it is the most interesting thing I have seen in a long time."

"Is it not characteristic? Ah! none but a true Italian can understand it. We are the only nation that goes heart and soul into a thing like this."

"I can understand it too, a little."

"As an outsider, an on-looker, I am in it, it is part of my very life. But let us dance, we are wasting time standing here."

He led her to the centre of the room and they soon joined the other dancers.

"I am so glad you wore my flowers to-night," the Duke said, as they paused, "it is as a good omen, white roses are the sign of hope, as we Italians are taught."

"Hope is the divinest gift man can have," began

Florence, "but I think you hardly need it. What more could you desire?"

"There are many things," and he sighed. "There was once a man who desired a rich jewel. It sparkled and shone in his sight and he wished to possess it. It was not to be bought with money, its value far exceeded that. How do you think he should have won it?"

"He should have earned it," she answered slowly. "I think if he desired it very much every new obstacle in his path was so much more to overcome. If a race is worth entering it is worth winning, my lord."

The Duke looked at her surprised. He had not expected such an answer. Had she understood?

They walked slowly through several of the rooms.

"How long does this last?" asked Florence.

"Till midnight. When the clock strikes all noise and revelry cease and everyone goes down on their knees. It is an impressive sight."

"How well you know it all," she exclaimed, "I have learned so much since I have been here tonight. One should always see a people either in a great misfortune or a great festival, such as this."

"We Italians," he began, "have more feeling than other nations, we can enjoy this so much, and yet we can suffer much, too, and grandly."

"That is because all laughter is very close to tears. Italy, like her people, is composed of two extremes, the light side being the palaces, the dark side the beggars. Is it not so?"

"You have spoken wonderfully but I must leave

you now, here is Alessandro. Will you let me take the flower of hope with me ?”

“If you will,” she answered, holding out one of the roses.

“Not that,” he answered. “The flower I wear is invisible, and lies just over my heart.”

When he was gone, Florence was watching the dancers when her unknown companion of the morning accosted her.

“You see I am true to my word,” he began. “I have found you at last. Come let us dance.”

Florence shook her head.

“What! You will not? What have I done that I should be treated so! You would not dare refuse that Italian!”

“Sir, I desire you to leave me!” Florence was at her haughtiest.

“I will, then, but not till I have had my revenge. You may think he is in love with you, but he does not care a straw for you. I vowed once he should not get ahead of me. Don’t scream for Tony; he is not here this time. I mean business, and you shall dance with me if I have to kidnap you to do it.”

With this terrible threat Florence was thoroughly roused. Her companion came towards her and she, with disgust and fright and horror on her face, turned and with a quick movement glided out of the room. She looked behind her, saw that he was still following her, when with a sudden terror she rushed out of the door and flew down the street as if pursued by all the furies.

CHAPTER VIII.

Florence once in the street felt the soft night breeze blow upon her face. All was confusion. What earlier in the day had been mere fun had now degenerated into debauchery. Fires had been lighted along the streets which made it almost as light as day.

For a time she ran on in mad haste pursued in her thoughts by the terrible man who had spoken to her. A careless word as she passed was the only notice the crowd gave her. At last overcome by fatigue and out of breath she paused and glanced behind her. Her pursuer was nowhere to be seen, how foolish she had been, she would turn back and return to the ball-room. The air was growing chilly too. She turned and paced through the long Italian streets but they had an unfamiliar look, and after growing foot-sore and weary she stopped again, this time completely baffled.

She was a girl who at all times had been accustomed to rely on her own resources, and now her courage did not fail her, though a strange, indefinite fear came over her. She resolved to wait till she met a policeman and get him to take her back.

As she started again, a young boy accosted her.

"Where are you going, Signorita? You are too young and too pretty to be out alone so late as this."

Without answering she continued on her way, and a loud ringing laugh from a small group of bystanders followed.

"Cospetto, I shan't let that young bantam crow over me," said one of them, and with a leer that was meant to be fascinating, he turned to Florence.

"Have no fear, bella mia, I will protect you. Just to receive a glance from your eyes is reward enough."

"You are too mild, Rinaldo," said the first. "I have not been in the theatre for nothing. Listen to this."

"Signorita," turning to Florence, "when my eye lights on your face and form it seems as if Venus had visited this sphere again."

"Who is ripe for a true Carnival jest?" exclaimed Rinaldo, "I am the mountain king, beauty such as this blooms best in mountain fastnesses, take her away."

Florence, who up to this time had been as one completely stunned, suddenly roused herself at this last daring project.

Her only escape lay in slipping away from them into the darkness. Either they guessed her design or knew it by intuition, for, with a sudden movement, Rinaldo sprang forward and three or four others joined hands leaving Florence in the centre of a ring and began singing at the top of their voices an Italian song, the refrain of which was :

"Ta-ran, ta-ran, ta-ra."

Florence covered her face with her hands and sobbed as if her heart would break. How would all this end ?

All at once a voice she knew well sounded on her ear.

“What is all this ? For shame ! do you know no better than to frighten an unprotected girl ? Go home, all of you, and find some better employment for yourselves than this ?”

They reluctantly desisted and went singing down the street, and when they had completely gone Florence held up her head and encountered the Duke's glance.

“Miss Harrington, is it possible !” he exclaimed, “How came you here ?”

Welcome as he always was to her, he was doubly so now.

“I am lost,” she answered. “I was frightened in the ball-room by some one, so I ran out and tried to get back again, but could not find my way.”

“And you have walked all this distance alone, my poor child !”

“Take me back ; I am so tired, and Celia will be looking for me.”

“The ball is over now, and we are miles from your home. Come with me ; it is only a short distance farther.”

She obeyed mechanically.

They proceeded in silence for a time till Florence saw in alarm that the houses were growing farther and farther apart and they seemed to be on the outskirts of the city. She stopped suddenly.

"M. le Duc," she began, almost imperiously, "I cannot go farther till you tell me where we are going, it is growing late and we are on a very lonely road."

"Can you not trust me? We will be at our destination very soon, Signorita, have no fear. Do you remember how you trusted me on the plank that day? Did I not bring you over safely? Trust me now in the same way and all will be well."

She looked up at him. He was bending towards her earnestly, his dark eyes soft and tender and wistful, the golden circlet still on his brow, his beauty transforming him, while the noble, the proud, the chivalrous bearing won Florence.

"I will trust you," she said, "take me wherever you will."

They proceeded for some little time till the Duke stopped before the door of a tiny cottage and knocked.

Presently an old woman appeared.

"Cattarina, Cattarina," exclaimed the Duke, "open the door quickly."

"It is the caro maestro," said the old woman and with feverish haste opened the door and led them into a small but scrupulously clean room.

Florence sank down exhausted, and Cattarina bent over her.

"Poor Signorita! Poor child, she has travelled far, perhaps. I will get something to bathe her head."

"Cattarina," said the Duke, "the Signorita is

weak and faint ; have you anything in the way of food ? ”

“ I have some gruel that I can warm up in an instant ; she shall have it as soon as it can be prepared. ”

She bustled away to the kitchen.

“ Miss Harrington, ” began the Duke, “ Cattarina is an old servant of mine. You are in good hands if you will stay here for the remainder of the night. I will go and tell your friends you are in safe keeping. ”

“ Oh, don’t leave me here alone ! I should much rather return home. What would Celia think ? Is there no way ? Cannot you take me back ? ”

“ I will try. Stay here and rest a little longer ; I shall not be gone long. ”

He passed out and Florence was left alone. Not for long, however. Old Cattarina returned with the gruel, coaxed Florence to take it as if she had been a child, then tried to persuade her to lie down ; then she put on her own hat and cloak, murmuring words to herself of which the only intelligent ones were “ caro maestro. ”

Presently the Duke returned, nodded to Cattarina, and turned to Florence.

“ I have a carriage outside ; come, you will soon be home again, now. ”

Florence obeyed mechanically. She and Cattarina entered the carriage and the Duke closed the door as Florence murmured a faint “ thank you. ”

They passed through labyrinths of dark streets,

strewn with the remains of the Carnival, and at last arrived at Celia's.

When the carriage stopped, the Duke opened the door again. How he got there Florence never knew, and soon she had her arms around Celia and they were all talking at once.

"Good-night," said the Duke, extending his hand. "I shall drop in soon to see how to-night's Carnival and your own venturesomeness affected you, Miss Harrington. Rinaldo and his companions came near getting the best of you.

"Ta ran, ta-ran, ta-ra,"

do you remember?"

"Shall I ever forget!" answered Florence, with a burning blush.

The adieux were soon said, and Florence, overcome by sleep and fatigue, retired to her own room, feeling that for once in her life she had seen a Roman Carnival, and that since she had quitted it that morning a life-time had passed.

Several days later, as she was sitting in the court, Tony came to her. They had intuitively avoided each other since that memorable day when she had blighted all his hopes.

He seated himself beside her in silence.

Florence looked at him. He seemed pale, worn, and weary. All her woman's pity was roused.

"What is it, Tony?" she said.

"Florence, once you tendered me your friendship. I, like a fool, flung it from me, and you

said—I remember it so well, how you looked when you said : ‘There will come a time when you will not despise it.’ Is it too late now ?”

“I knew you would do this, Tony,” she answered. “I can give you the most sincere friendship, but do not ask me for my love.”

“All that is past now. I was moved by mad infatuation, jealousy—I know not what, and I care not. Florence, you have given me your friendship and I am going to put it to the test. I want you to help me as only you know how.”

“It is about Miss Blount, is it not, Tony ?”

“How did you guess it so soon ?”

“I am not blind. But go on ; what is it you want me to do ?”

“Oh, Florence, I have been so miserable ! Grace and I have had a violent quarrel. She was jealous and I got angry ; then she was angry, too, and altogether I feel ashamed to look her in the face again.”

“Then you really care for her, Tony ?”

“Oh ! so much, Florence. For our friendship—for my sake—go to her, tell her I am not angry, entreat her to make up with me ; say anything ; use your utmost tact ; tell her this miserable quarrel must cease.”

Florence paused a moment before she answered.

“Tony, you have asked for my friendship and I would willingly do anything for you ; but this you ask me, I cannot. This is no place for an outsider. Go yourself to Grace Blount ; tell her what you have told me. She is waiting for you to do this.”

“I will take your advice. Florence, you are an angel !”

“Oh, no ; not an angel,” she said, with a smile.
“Only a friend.”

CHAPTER IX.

They were in the Colosseum one warm moonlight night. They, consisted of Celia, Alessandro, Tony, Grace, Florence and Adrian.

After wandering about admiring everything they stopped to rest, and Florence, seated herself in a wide embrasure of what had once been a window, while the Duke, leaning against the framework in the shadow, might well have been taken for one of the statues of the place.

"How beautiful this is," said Florence, who was always affected by the subtle Italian moonlight, "and to think I am going away so soon. Ah ! how I shall miss it all."

The Duke started suddenly.

"You going away, Miss Harrington ; where could you go to ?"

"To my home, to America, you forget that I am only a stranger here."

"But you have liked it here, are fond of Rome, perhaps, are you not ?"

"Very fond of it and I can never forget all you have done for me, particularly that night of the

Carnival. I cannot fully express my thanks, I am very grateful, believe me."

"Will you promise me never to forget these times that we have been together, we have been so happy, it has been the greatest pleasure of my life. When I think how soon the memory plays us false it almost frightens me. One day I see you sitting before me here in the moonlight, the next, one hundred miles of ocean divides us and soon nothing remains, not even the ability to remember it all."

"It is a pity," she answered simply, "I should like never to move from this spot, the moonlight, the shadows, the quiet of it all strikes right down to my heart; I think I could sit here forever."

She was not looking at him but straight before her out in the moonlight, her clear, tranquil eyes dwelling lingeringly and almost caressingly on the scene.

"Could you be content to live here always? Could you care enough for me to link your life to mine?"

Florence rose and turned towards him.

"What are you saying? Why do you ask me these things?"

"I love you," he said passionately. "Could you care enough for me to accept so worthless a creature as I am and make me happy for the rest of my life?"

He was bending over her and as she raised her eyes to his they were filled with tears.

"You have done me too much honor," she said,

brokenly, "what have I ever done to win so great a love?"

"Then you will not refuse me, you will try to care for me a little?"

"I will give you all I have and all I am, my future, my life," and more slowly, "my love."

"May God help me to keep them worthily," he said, fervently, "ah, Florence you have made me more than happy to-day, I ask but one thing more."

"It is granted," she said, smiling.

He bent down and kissed her.

"This is our betrothal, how the moon shines, it is a good omen, happiness will follow us."

"It could not be otherwise," she answered.

* * * * *

Several days later the Duke gave another of his small dinners at his palace. He had invited only those whom he and Florence knew best. When they were all assembled he rose and approached Florence.

"Let me escort you, you are the guest of honor to-night, though Tony and Miss Blount think they have it all to themselves."

Tony and Grace had announced their engagement that very morning.

"I shall be looked upon as a regular matrimonial agent," said Celia, "all these engagements having taken place under my roof. I shall be besieged with mothers with marriageable daughters; I might make quite a fortune out of it."

"Florence," said Tony to her, "your advice was just what I wanted, I did just as you told me and it all came out right. You don't feel jealous that you have only second place, do you?"

"How could I, Tony," she said, "I chose second when I might have been first."

"Will you give us a toast?" said the Duke to Alessandro.

Whereupon he rose and proposed :

"The three graces, as represented here."

Then,

"Each to his own particular grace."

The toasts were drunk with much merriment and in the middle of it Giovanni gave the Duke a card. He glanced hurriedly at it, then said :

"Friends you must excuse me a moment as important business demands my instant attention."

As he left the room Florence followed him with her eyes, and presently Giovanni returned and requested Alessandro and Tony to join the Duke.

The meal ended abruptly. Celia and Grace held a low conversation but Florence waited in vain for the return of the rest of the party. Finally, curiosity prompted her to look in and see what they were doing.

She looked, and saw the picture she had bought, in the middle of the room, Tony's canvas torn off it and on the ground.

The Duke stood, deadly pale, while a man, strangely familiar to her, was saying :

"You are all three to be put under the penalty of the law. You, my lord," turning to the Duke,

“for allowing this painting to pass out of the country ; you,” to Alessandro, “for aiding and abetting some dealer ; and you,” to Tony, “for your share in this nefarious affair, for cheating the Italian government.”

“What does this mean ?” said Florence, suddenly advancing. “This painting is mine. I bought it and had it charged to my bankers. This gentleman was my agent, and this one I forced to the contrivance that has been discovered for taking it out of the country.”

“You did this !” said the Duke, advancing. But the official, with a wave of his hand, checked him.

“Silence !” he said. “Now young woman, whoever you are, proceed. Am I to understand you thought out this design alone ?”

“I did, most assuredly.”

“Then you will pay the highest penalty for this, as you are the instigator.”

“She shall not,” exclaimed the Duke, “I protest——”

“You have nothing to say, remember the law still has its clutches on you for your part in this affair.”

“He is innocent,” said Florence, “you are accusing him unjustly, he had no idea that painting was leaving the country nor did he know that I was the purchaser. You represent the Italian law, I think it would be better, if instead of accusing innocent persons you would invent some law where Italian noblemen can gain a livelihood instead of

starving, when one painting sold would feed them for more than a year."

Celia and Grace now came forward.

"Why, Mr. Felini," exclaimed Celia, "is it you who is making all this trouble? I have not seen you since I have been married; How have you been?"

"Broken-hearted, as usual, of course," he answered, "when you deserted me."

"I do not allow that now. I want you to meet my friend. Florence, this is Mr. Felini."

"I have never met him before," she said, "but he has persecuted me enough during the carnival." Turning to the Duke, "this is the man I ran away from."

"Cospetto! was that you?" exclaimed Mr. Felini, "I beg you ten thousand pardons. I thought it was Celia all the time. You were dressed alike."

"What are you going to do with me," she asked, "does the Italian government imprison offenders?"

"Sometimes, but you will escape with a heavy fine. You are the cleverest girl I ever met."

The Duke took up the painting and went to the gallery. Florence followed him.

"Now that we two are alone together," he said, "I want to thank you for all you have done for me, you championed me most nobly just now too, it was more than I expected and more than my right."

"You yourself gave me that right," she said, raising her head proudly, "the other night when we were in the Colosseum; do you forget that?"

"And to think I never should have known about the picture but for an accident. Oh, Florence, you must have cared for me very much even then, to have risked so much. Tell me, had you learned to like me even then?"

"I cared for you always," she answered, blushing at her own confession.

"Florence," he said, after a pause, "I have no ring to give you and you know why I cannot buy you one. Will you take these pearls instead? See, they are fit for a princess. They are the first of my few possessions that I shall soon bestow on you. I have but two requests to make, first, that you wear my pearls, and secondly, that you call me Adrian."

He held to her a string of priceless pearls.

"They are indeed beautiful," said Florence, a little sadly, "but do you not realize that pearls mean tears?"

"We Italians say that they mean good wishes. Come, let me clasp them on for you; they are not whiter than your own neck."

"I am not afraid of tears with you to share them with me, nor of anything the future may bring forth. How often these pearls must have played a part in just such a scene as we are going through to-day!"

"Many times indeed! Let me clasp them on for you. If every pearl were a good wish from me to you, you would have strings of them reaching to your feet."

He clasps them about her neck, and she stands,

smiling the while, happy as a gay young girl ; but that circlet round her neck is the first bond placed there by the hand of love. She is no longer free, but if her chains are all so light and silken, and are covered by a jewel as priceless, she is indeed happy.

No longer a gay and careless girl, but a woman standing on the threshold of the highest estate she can be called to, pausing, ere she enters, to cast a last retrospective glance on her vanishing girlhood.

The Prince of Voronzoff.

The Prince of Voronzoff.

CHAPTER I.

“THE BETROTHAL.”

It was the night of one of the large balls at St. Petersburg. The evening was far advanced and drawing to a close, for everything temporal must have an end.

The music was rising and falling and its soft dreamy cadences fell soothingly upon the ear. In the conservatory, however, the music was heard but faintly, mingled with the sound of the plashing of many fountains. In that bower of perpetual summer, a young girl, tall and graceful, was seated, languidly moving a large fan to and fro and listening to the ardent words of her companion. He was a man of middle age, dark and swarthy, whose haughty bearing, if nothing else, stamped him one of the nobility. Just at present he was trying to change his hauteur into something like supplication.

“Ah, Sonia, were you mine, my life would be turned into one eternal Heaven,” were his passionate words, “men call me rich and powerful, but were I to lay a kingdom at your feet I would deem it small reward for possession of a jewel so priceless.”

The young girl rose.

“These are wild words to address to such as I, the Prince of Voronzoff flatters Sonia Valovitch.”

“Flatters ! nay, flattery were not possible to use to such as you, I am speaking my innermost feelings. I lay my heart, my soul, my fortune at your feet. I love you ! Sonia, can you make this sacrifice for me ?”

“Oh, Alexis, to become your wife will be my greatest happiness though I am all unworthy of you.”

“My darling,” and he kissed her on the forehead many times. The young girl looked at her lover with love as well as tears in her eyes.

“You are rich, so very rich, and I am sorry, it spoils all the romance.”

“And I am glad, dearest, for your sake, so very glad, that now you shall share it all with me.”

They talked on for some time longer, and when they rose to leave the conservatory, Sonia touched Alexis lightly with her fan. She pointed to the decoration on his breast, given him by the Czar.

“You have all,” she said, almost sadly, “wealth, rank and honors, even this badge is a token of esteem.”

“I think more of this decoration than of all the

rest, yet would they all count as nothing if with them I could not win the bride of my heart."

He extended his arm and they passed into the ball-room.

Many an admiring eye was turned upon them, as the tall, graceful girl and the distinguished looking suitor passed through the rooms. He looked fond, triumphant, but Sonia Valovitch had a love beyond mere looks. She loved ardently, passionately, without rhyme or reason ; such love should be only for immortals, for it brings to us poor earthly beings only sorrow and heart pangs, and the object who has awakened it little knows the heat of the fire that consumes all in its way.

CHAPTER II.

THE MARRIAGE.

The courtship was all too short to both lovers, and as the time drew near for the marriage, both felt instinctively that they were leaving the happiest period of their lives behind them. The ceremony was to be performed very quietly at the home of Alexis in the country, in the presence of a few friends, for the Prince's mother was paralyzed and desired to witness the marriage of her only son. Accordingly, on the day set apart for it, all was in readiness, and the friends and relatives began to assemble.

"The Count of Voronzoff!" was announced, and as Alexis looked at the new-comer his brow contracted into a frown, his color heightened with displeasure, and, instead of advancing to greet his cousin, he only said in his cold, proud voice, with additional hauteur :

"Nicholas, how is this? In civilian dress! I had expected at least you would have done me the honor of appearing as befits your rank."

"My dear cousin," answered Nicholas, with cutting emphasis, "I relied on your hospitality of receiving me here in whatsoever garb I presented myself; I see I was mistaken."

Sonia stood by wondering what there could be about the young man to make Alexis so very rude, for at the first glance it could be seen that the two men inwardly hated each other, but Sonia only saw a young man, very tall, very dark and very handsome.

"Alexis," said Nicholas, "are you really going to get married to-day?"

"Certainly," said Alexis, growing pale, "are you mad? why should I not?"

"You should know best. However, since it is your will let it be done, I am the last to question it, the will of the Prince of Voronzoff is, as we all know, supreme."

Nicholas moved on, and Alexis, with clouded brow, turned to some new arrivals.

"Don't look so stormy, Alexis," said Sonia, in her soft voice, when they were once more comparatively by themselves, "who is your cousin, and why should he object to our marriage?"

"My cousin is the Count of Voronzoff, an officer in the imperial guards, the two branches of the family have always quarrelled with each other since the days of the middle ages, the cause of the quarrel is forgotten but the quarrel remains, he is angry at my marriage because he is my heir and has always looked upon himself as such, now, my Sonia, forget him."

Much as Sonia tried to obey Alexis, Nicholas came again and again to her thoughts with a mixture of curiosity and fear. But she was destined to see more of him, for after the ceremony he was with them again.

"My cousin should be the happiest of men for having procured so lovely a bride, you must not indulge him too much or he will be quite spoiled I assure you."

"I am afraid it will be just the other way and that he will indulge me too much," Sonia answered.

"Such a thing were not possible," then he said in a lower tone and rapidly, "you must get Alexis to bring you to St. Petersburg next winter."

"Alexis has already planned where to spend the winter without the help of his thoughtful cousin," answered the Prince, with a sneer.

"Then I can prophesy your winter will be a most pleasant one, for whatever the Prince plans is sure to be most charming," and with a low bow Nicholas passed on in the crowd.

CHAPTER III.

BEHIND THE SCENES.

The guests were now departing one by one, until finally the last had gone and darkness had shut in upon the scene.

The mother of Alexis called Sonia to her, and taking her fresh young face between her thin, frail hands uttered a fervent blessing. "This is the happiest day I have had for many years, and I thank God I have been preserved to see Alexis married to one so worthy of him."

"So much above him you mean mother," said Alexis, "Sonia is not to be compared with ordinary mortals."

"I have no doubt that Sonia is all she should be and more too," answered the mother, "all I ask of you, my dear, is to be good to my boy." Sonia blushed with all this praise, and kissing the old lady a warm good night she and Alexis were left alone.

"Sonia," said Alexis, coming over to where she sat, "this has been the happiest day of my life.

I have one request to make to you. Will you not play for me ?”

She went to the piano and soon the soft melodious strains of the immortal Mozart re-echoed through the room.

Sonia played for some time as one in a dream, for her thoughts were following the events of the day, and soon she left the piano and seated herself on a stool at her husband’s feet.

“Your cousin,” she began, hesitatingly, “Nicholas, why were you so cross to him to-day ?”

“Happy Nicholas ! to be so much in your thoughts ; have I not already told you there exists an old quarrel between our families ?”

“Yes ; but even so, what does it avail to be kept up so year after year ? Oh ! Alexis, for my sake give up this quarrel, go to your cousin and tell him you forgive him everything and will be friends with him, begin this new life with this resolution, and you will never regret it. If you would please me, let this miserable feud you neither understand come to an end.”

“Sonia !” said Alexis, in surprise, “what are you saying ? You do not understand these things. What you ask is altogether impossible !”

“And you will not grant my request ?”

“I cannot. Listen, Sonia ; I will explain to you some things and, remember once for all, this is the last time I ever want my cousin or the quarrel referred to again in my presence. I may as well tell you, Sonia, as you are one of the family now, what my cousin’s character really is. He is a very hand-

some fellow, it is true, but so wild ! I will spare you a detail of his escapades, but what is your opinion of a man who, although he passes for a single man, has actually a wife and children ?”

“ A wife ?”

“ A real, true wife. He was married to her by all the laws of Church and State a little more than a year ago, and supports her on the Voronzoff estate. We are a proud race and can ill brook such a thing, though of course we keep it a secret as it would bring dishonor on our name.”

“ A wife and children,” murmured Sonia.

“ I have only told you this to warn you of him ; you must not mention it to a living soul. Even my mother, on account of her delicate health, is ignorant of it ; the disgrace would kill her outright.”

“ I will never betray your confidence, Alexis. It is almost too horrible to be true.” And with this Sonia bade her husband good night and retired to her sleeping apartment.

Alexis sat for a long time before the fire, after his wife had left him, evidently in deep thought.

“ Ah ! now my cousin, the Count, you may have laid your plans well, but, I flatter myself, I am one too many for you,” and so saying the Prince of Voronzoff retired for the night.

CHAPTER IV.

PRINCE AND PRINCESS.

A year had passed, and Sonia and Alexis found themselves again at Danilovski. A year which had brought only happiness to this loving pair, and when Winter came again Sonia presented her husband with a little son.

It was Spring, and Danilovski looked at its best, just putting on its verdant mantle. The family is assembled in the breakfast-room, breakfast is over, Alexis is looking out of the window, his mother looking over her correspondence, Sonia reading the newspaper.

"I declare it feels almost like Summer itself!" said Alexis. "Sonia, I hope soon to convert you into liking this beautiful spot better than your dear St. Petersburg."

"I am afraid, then, you will have to make it very attractive for me. St. Petersburg admits of no rival!"

"That is a point, then, on which we differ. To me, St. Petersburg is a place only to work in. While I am there, I am busy from morning till

night ; while here, you have nothing to do but watch the progress of nature all day long. But how is this ?” taking a note from the floor. “ Merciful heavens !” turning suddenly pale, “ it is in Nicholas’s handwriting. What can he want here ?” and he glanced almost involuntarily at Sonia.

“ What can this mean ? he says : ‘ Your favor just received, and I shall be with you on the eleventh, it is so kind of you to remember me. ’ Bah, I have no patience with him,” and Alexis tore the paper into countless fragments and threw them upon the floor.

“ Alexis,” pleaded the feeble voice of his mother, “ listen to me for a moment, I have asked Nicholas to come and spend a few weeks with us, Poleska is coming and you know he always had a fancy for her.”

“ I don’t care, he can do his love making anywhere but in my house, and it was very wrong in you to invite him here knowing as you do my opinion of him.”

“ Alexis, Alexis, do not speak like this, I had hoped to bring you together again, your father was anxious to heal over the breach, but, he died before it was accomplished.”

With this the mother sighed and was wheeled away for she could not walk.

As soon as her attendants were gone, Alexis turned to Sonia, “ Sonia, remember what I told you of Nicholas, he is a man no one can trust too far, he is about to become an unwelcome guest beneath our roof, you will have to treat him as if you had

heard nothing at all against him, don't be cold and distant to him, treat him just as you would any other, only this, you cannot be too careful not to let him even suspect you know his secret, if you do we are ruined, there is no telling what he would do."

Alexis said this with so much genuine feeling that Sonia laughed merrily.

"My dear Alexis, one would think you were really afraid of Nicholas, from the way you talk."

"Afraid of him?" said Alexis, nervously, "why should I be? I, that is, how ridiculous, what has the Prince of Voronzoff to fear from such as he," he added with his usual hauteur.

But here the baby was brought in and Sonia took him in her arms.

"You have not seen our baby yet to-day, Alexis," she said, "is he not a bright little fellow?"

"Oh, I suppose so," said Alexis, absently, "I am not a judge of babies."

"Do you not want to hold him? see, the little fellow wants to go to you?"

"I hold him," said Alexis, with ill feigned surprise, "I don't know how to coddle an infant, even if he is the future Prince of Voronzoff."

And he turned and left the room.

CHAPTER V.

CONSPIRACY.

Nicholas was seated in his small apartment in St. Petersburg, enjoying one of his few hours of leisure, when the servant announced, "A gentleman to see you, sir."

"Show him up," said Nicholas, rising.

The visitor entered, a tall lean man, who looked as if he belonged to one of the lower classes.

"I am sorry to trespass on your valuable time, Count," he began, "but affairs can rest in their present state no longer, something must be done."

"Well, I have done all I can, Ivan," answered the Count, wearily.

"Look here, Count, you have always been friendly towards me and I don't want to make a scandal, but, I declare if something is not done my poor sister will starve, what right have high-born to marry the like of us if they are ashamed of it afterwards, I have half a mind to go to the Prince of Voronzoff myself."

"You must not do that, indeed you must not," exclaimed Nicholas, "he must not hear another

word of this, remember you are bound to secrecy, come, name your sum and I will pay it willingly for peace."

The man named a sum and Nicholas counted out the money and threw it across the table.

"May the good Lord preserve you," said the man fervently.

"Come now, none of that, Ivan, remember your God and mine are not one."

"I wish you, Count, who are so good in so many ways, could be drawn more towards God."

"You weary me, Ivan," said Nicholas, languidly, "how often have I told you that to me there is no God."

"Heaven forbid ! sir. Good night."

"I am rid of him for one month at least," sighed Nicholas as he put on his cloak, and soon his steps led him far from the courts of fashion into the gloomier thoroughfares of want and depression.

He entered a small house that had been the scene of many conspiracies and several more men like himself worked all night to accomplish their designs. In the early gray of the morning Nicholas walked home feeling more than seeing the beauties of the early spring morning, and he heaved a sigh as he thought of the millions of souls languishing in Siberian dens powerless, and at the mercy of only one human being like themselves, for a Czar, be he ever so mighty, is still only a man after all.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PRINCE'S HEIR.

The day came for the arrival of the Count of Voronzoff at the castle. Poleska was already there, and she and Sonia became friends at once.

It was a warm Spring afternoon, and the little group did not have to wait long for the new arrival. Soon the horses were heard on the road, and in another instant, as they drove up at full speed to the door, Nicholas sprang out with agility and stood on the threshold, an unwelcome guest. Sonia stepped forward.

"You have arrived just at the moment," she said. "Such exactness is surprising."

"You are not accustomed to military men," said Alexis. "They are compelled to be always on time, you know. But come in, Nicholas; we must not stand here."

They entered the drawing-room, and as they advanced, a young girl arose and greeted Nicholas.

"How do you do, Nicholas; you have not forgotten Poleska Mikaelovitch?"

“Forgotten you, Poleska ; that were impossible ! I might not have recognized you, though, you are so much of a young lady.”

“And do you regret it ?”

“Regret it, no ! It is useless recalling the past. I only hope the young lady will fill the place of the little girl I knew and played with.”

“That you may tell me one month from now, but come, Sonia is pouring you out a cup of tea.”

This was the reception Nicholas received, no one bade him welcome, no one said they were glad he had come.

He slowly drank his tea, Sonia glanced at him once or twice with a feeling of dislike mingled with fear.

“You have come to a very quiet place, Nicholas,” said Alexis, in his cold, hard tone, “I fear you will find it hard work to pass your time.”

“I am not afraid of that,” answered Nicholas, “any place the Prince of Voronzoff delights in will surely find favor even with me.”

Alexis looked at his cousin and bit his lips, much as he hated him he felt Nicholas had the better of him.

“And now,” said the Count, as he finished his tea, “I should like, above all things, to see the son and heir, may I, Sonia ?”

Sonia looked at Alexis.

“Well, I, what do you think, Alexis ?”

“Certainly, have him brought,” then turning to the servant, “the Count of Voronzoff desires to see

the child, tell the nurse to bring him without delay."

The child was brought and the nurse carried him straight to Nicholas, who took him in his arms.

Sonia felt a pang when she saw the helpless infant in his arms; Alexis, though evidently proud of his little boy, seldom took any notice of him, always giving as his excuse—"he knew nothing about babies," and here was Nicholas holding the child with no ungentle hand, yet this little morsel of humanity was the only obstacle between him and the title he had looked forward to.

He gazed at it for some time in silence, then handed it back to the nurse, saying at the same time to Sonia, "Poor little fellow, he looks delicate, he is named Alexis, of course."

"No," said Sonia, "Alexis did not want the child named for him so I called him Sergius, I did want to name him Ivan, but Alexis said he had unpleasant associations with the name."

Both men started.

"Why, Sonia, where did you get that idea?" asked Alexis.

"Why you yourself told me so?" said Sonia, surprised.

"Did I, well, then, of course I meant it."

"Very likely," said Nicholas.

"What?" asked Alexis, sharply.

"I only said that what the Prince of Voronzoff says he means."

CHAPTER VII.

THE NIHILIST.

"Sonia," said Alexis, when they were alone, "I did not like the way you treated Nicholas, why were you so distant to him?"

"Distant, was I, Alexis, I am sorry if I displeased you, but after what you told me of him I could not do otherwise."

"Merciful Heavens," exclaimed Alexis, "are you still child enough to show a person you do not like them?"

"I always show my feelings, Alexis, I cannot help it."

"Well, now, I am sorry I spoke to you, forget it my Sonia, my cousin is one of us now, for a time at least, he is very fair on the surface but in his heart the Count of Voronzoff is an atheist and a schemer, he owns to no God and even turns against the Czar."

"Thank you, Alexis," said Nicholas, entering, "for giving Sonia so good a description of me. I hope she realizes what a really bad man I am."

"Then you own it?" she said.

"Certainly, I do, it would not make me less bad to hide it."

"But you surely are not an atheist?"

"That is rather a strong term, but it is true that I acknowledge no God."

"How dreadful," sighed Sonia.

"Is he not a terrible man," said Alexis smiling, fortunately there are few like him."

"And do you not like the Czar? Are you really a-a—"

"A Nihilist," answered Nicholas, "yes, I am a Nihilist."

"You have it from his own lips," said her husband. "You may be comparatively safe now, but there is one place where all such go, most inevitably."

"Where is that?" asked Nicholas.

"Siberia," answered Alexis.

At the mention of that dreadful place both men shuddered, then Alexis said, "Nicholas, you must not tell my poor wife any more about yourself, she is not prepared for so much depravity," and with these words he left the room.

"I would not like to think you altogether despised me," said Nicholas, in a tone it was well Alexis did not hear, for Nicholas could be very fascinating when he chose. "Force of circumstances have made me what I am."

Sonia looked at him for some moments in silence, then said earnestly, "but you will not be always like that, it would be dreadful, you will try to be better, will you not?"

“I fear I can never change now, Sonia.”

“Oh, don’t say that, perhaps if I helped you a little, may I? I don’t believe I could convert you, but won’t you give me leave to try.”

“Certainly, you may try as much as you like, but you will find it a difficult task. I am adamant.”

“We shall see,” answered Sonia, gaily, “you may laugh, but I think it is just what you need.”

“It is just what you need,” murmured Nicholas, when she had gone. “Just what I need, well, perhaps so, but, Sonia Voronzoff, you do not know me yet, the only way to my soul, if I have one, is through my heart, and that, alas, has gone forever.” Whereupon he fell into a reverie deep and long, and the young officer’s thoughts were tinged with sadness as he reflected on his past life.

CHAPTER VIII.

SONIA'S INFLUENCE.

Nicholas was thrown much with Poleska during the weeks that ensued, and if he treated her only as a friend it was apparent to all eyes save his, that she was beginning to look upon him with a warmer regard.

The Count had long ago buried his heart, and now his head told him that Poleska would make him an excellent wife, being young, accomplished and beautiful.

One warm Summer's afternoon he took a walk to think over these things. He was in a thoughtful mood and particularly wished to avoid meeting Alexis.

He was walking slowly along one of the rural lanes when he perceived Sonia seated on a fallen tree trunk with a little book in her hand. He had hoped to pass by her unnoticed but she perceived him and exclaimed, "Nicholas, do you not know me? Come over here and talk to me, are you going to pass me by?"

Nicholas seated himself on the fallen tree, and after awhile remarked, "What brought you out this hot Summer's day? it seems to me it were better for you to be home with your husband and child than sitting by the wayside like this."

"My husband and child can spare me these few hours, I think," answered Sonia, with hauteur. "They are not given over to idleness, I assure you. I have been hard at work, and am resting a few moments before Church begins."

"And what is there to work at?" asked the Count, looking up and down the road.

"I have all my poor to visit. They are so grateful and kind it is a pleasure to serve them."

"But do you not think you could do more good to those around you than running after poor peasants?"

"Those around me do not need help."

"Some do, myself for instance; I need your help badly."

"Tell me how, and I will help you if it lays within my power."

"Well, then," began Nicholas, "my life, my desire, my everything, is fixed on obtaining Poleska for my own. I have waited all these long years, hoping that by look or word she would show me that I had not hoped in vain. Oh, Sonia, you do not know how much I desire this! Help me to gain a wife—help me to win Poleska—and the happiness you will confer upon me will be ten times greater than that of your poor peasants."

"Nicholas, I am sorry you should have spoken

of this to me, and more sorry still that I shall not be able to help you."

"Cannot help me? Oh, Sonia, do not tell me that! In what have I failed? Give me some reason for this!"

"I cannot; your own conscience should tell you. I am sorry, I find I am disappointed in you, I had not believed you capable of this."

"Oh, why this mystery? Tell me all. Is it my religion, my politics, my manner, what? Oh, tell me that I may change."

"You have done yourself a permanent wrong. You have my greatest sympathy. Surely you know to what I allude. Think, analyze your position and you will realize that this marriage is impossible."

"You speak in mysteries. Sonia, tell me what it is you are alluding to. What have I done?"

"Don't ask me these questions, Nicholas, for indeed I cannot answer them. There; the church bell is ringing, I must leave you, or perhaps,—that is," growing embarrassed, "you would not care to come too?"

"To your church?"

"Yes, the service is just beginning."

Nicholas looked at the hot dusty road, the sun streaming down, then at the cool shady porch of the church, which looked particularly inviting to him.

"I will go, Sonia," he said.

They entered the simple village edifice. Few people were assembled and the whole aspect of the

place was one of peace. Insensibly Nicholas, who had entered harassed and perplexed, felt, as the service proceeded, a quiet tranquility steal over him, and he glanced more than once at his companion whose whole soul was in her devotions, and he felt a sudden respect, reverence for the piety of the woman beside him. He felt drawn towards her as toward a superior being. He had seen many women in the gay Russian capital, knew all their intrigues and artifices, but he felt how far Sonia was above them all.

The short service was soon over, and the priest repeating the words, "May the blessing of the Lord our God be upon you," the congregation rose to leave.

They walked on in silence for some time. Then Nicholas said :

"Your church is a great comfort to you, is it not? You always feel happier when you have been there?"

"Ah, yes indeed. Oh, Nicholas, you do not understand it, but I wish with all my heart you could be led once more to become a Christian and a—"

"It is impossible ; I can never change now, but I admire it in others."

That same evening, as the Count was walking in the garden, he overheard a conversation between the Prince and his wife.

"I cannot allow you," Alexis was saying, with his usual hauteur, "to mix with the villagers, as I hear you have been doing this afternoon. They

are a dirty, lazy set and do not need your interference. Remember that you are the 'Princess of Voronzoff'."

"But, Alexis, they are good, deserving people."

"Not another word more," interrupted the Prince, imperiously, "If you do not care enough to maintain your own dignity, remember you are my wife, if nothing more."

The cold metallic accents fell upon Nicholas' ear as he moved away.

"The Prince of Voronzoff is a splendid title to hold," he muttered, "but a cold, heartless man can never make an affectionate husband. Ah, Sonia, marriage is a lottery. Let us hope you will never fare worse than you do now."

CHAPTER IX.

CASTE.

Sonia, Alexis, Poleska and Nicholas were all seated on the terrace in the soft Russian sunshine. Conversation turned on village matters, and Alexis was saying :

“The church is getting on nicely now. I am glad to say the priest was here this morning and thanked me for my donation. If everything was accomplished as easily as that nowadays there would be no trouble nor worry. Just hand the priest a certain sum, tell him to use it well, and he will tell you you will be pardoned for all your sins, and are sure of a future reward.”

“You should not jest on such matters, Alexis,” remonstrated Sónia, “Remember who giveth unto the poor lendeth unto the Lord.”

“I am not jesting, Sonia. No one cares more for the church than I do, and I think it is the duty of everyone to give what they can to support it, see all we lavish on our poor earthly bodies. Should not our souls be saved also?”

“How good and religious Uncle Alexis is,” said

Poleska to Nicholas, "the church would go to ruin without him. Why are you not as good as he?"

"It would take a long time for me to grow as good as he is," answered Nicholas, sarcastically.

"He is a model in every respect."

"I am glad you appreciate the fact, Nicholas," said Alexis.

Here the baby was brought out, and Poleska took him in her arms and seated herself at a little distance. Nicholas watched her some time before he joined her.

"Do you often take so much trouble to amuse a baby?" he asked, standing behind her chair.

"Ah, no; not all babies, but Sergius is one of my admirers. I cannot afford to lose any of them, you know."

"You have so many I do not think you would miss one or two."

"Perhaps not; it all depends on who they might be. You could not expect me to care for them all alike!"

"I suppose not. If Sergius and I are to be rivals, I give the preference to him and will drop out of the list."

"That would leave us broken-hearted, would it not, my Sergius?"

"I wish, Poleska, you would be sincere with me," he said, earnestly.

"Would you rather I say I care nothing for you, then?"

"That would be nearer the truth, anyhow."

"He says that would be nearer the truth, my Sergius—my little Prince of Voronzoff!"

"The Prince of Voronzoff, my Sergius, will get you more friends than only Sergius—especially with the ladies."

"You are cruel, Count," said Poleska, with spirit. "These titled gentlemen are touchy about their titles. Even you, Count, though a republican, still hold to your title."

The child held out his tiny arms to Nicholas, and gave a cry of joy when he felt his strong arms about him.

"Ah! Poleska, he is a deserter; the Prince of Voronzoff prefers me to you."

"You naughty, naughty boy, to give up your own aunt for your republican cousin!"

Here they both laughed, and a servant handed Nicholas a card. He only read, "Ivan Kersoff," but the change that came over him was wonderful.

"Where is this person?" he said, his hauteur almost like Alexis's own. "Tell him I cannot see him."

"He insists, Count, and is in the library."

Nicholas knit his brows, and, with an impatient exclamation, followed the servant into the house.

CHAPTER X.

OLD TIES.

“Did you ask to see me, Ivan?” he said as he entered the library. “I think there is some mistake here, is it not the Prince you desire to see?”

The man looked at Nicholas, he was the same who had annoyed him in the city.

“No,” he said, “I did not ask to see the Prince, it was the Count of Voronzoff I desired to see.”

“Pray be seated then and make your communication as short as possible.”

“Count, this thing has been going on long enough, and I am not to be put off this time.”

“Proceed,” said Nicholas, with a wave of the hand. “Who talks of putting you off?”

“Now, look here, I am tired of this any way. This is the last time I shall ever appear to you, hereafter, I shall act. Who is it that has robbed us of our happiness, of our caste, of our everything? You! You have ruined my Anna’s life, she is leading a life of shame, and all that is owing to you.”

"I do not understand you, Ivan."

"You do not. Merciful Heavens! can this be true? Were you not our friend, our familiar friend? Were we not working together? Did you not bring your cousin into our life? We, the victims, fell into your trap. It was a master stroke for you when Alexis, Prince of Voronzoff, made Anna his wife."

"It is false?" said Nicholas, with flashing eyes.

Alexis Voronzoff is Anna's lawful husband," said Ivan.

"Why do you not tell all this to him, then?"

"Why? Because you are the one at fault. Were we not working together, did we not plot together? I trusted you implicitly, but you have played us false, you have betrayed us. Oh, these heartless cruel nobles, it is nothing to rob a young girl of all that makes life worth living? These Princes lead their dissolute lives trampling on us, and we must suffer and be silent. I do not wonder there are Nihilists, and I am thankful for it, they will at least respect a poor girl's distress and will not be ashamed to own their wives." He paused and Sonia's voice was heard singing outside.

"It is she," murmured Nicholas, "it is Sonia."

"Ah, she does right to sing now," said Ivan, "but there will come a time when the song will be drowned in tears. Sing on my pretty one, 'they laugh best who laugh last,' and you will not long enjoy the title of Princess of Voronzoff."

"What are you going to do?" asked Nicholas.

"Be careful how you touch her, you shall not harm

one hair of her head. Do with me as you will, wreak your vengeance on us men, but Sonia and the infant must remain untouched. Remember, you have Nicholas Voronzoff to deal with."

"Calm yourself, Count, this excitement is needless," said Ivan, speaking slowly and looking sharply at Nicholas, "I really believe you are in love with Sonia, as you call her."

"Sir," said Nicholas, "this is going too far, what right have you to come here and make your gross accusations?"

"I have every right for coming here, as you well know, and from my heart I pity the young girl who has married your cousin. She has little chance of happiness in her life, poor thing. She may be married to the Prince of Voronzoff, but she little knows the characters of her associates; and I will tell you this my friend, the Count, you may be very proud of your dissolute family, but the house of Voronzoff is composed of haughty, cruel adventurers."

"How dare you speak so. Begone, sir, with your insolence."

"One word more, wickedness cannot live forever. Your wretched name has flourished for two centuries, its time will soon come, and when your castles are razed to the ground, your fields laid waste, and the last of your line has perished forever, then will all Russia rejoice and thank God that their country has been freed from the accursed Voronzoff. You are proud of your title, proud of your name, well, be so then, but I would a thousand

times rather have an honest and loyal heart than bear the title of Prince of Voronzoff."

Nicholas sat for a long time pondering over the conversation he had with Ivan, long after Ivan had gone. Anyone seeing Nicholas now would shrink away from him. Usually he was an attractive man, but to-night his handsome face was clouded. Ugly thoughts make ugly faces and Nicholas was no exception to the rule. His pride, his family, his name had been dragged in the dust by an up-start, and the worst of all was he had said that the Count loved Sonia. Loved Sonia, could it be possible? Yet, as he recollected, it was Sonia who was his constant companion and not Poleska, no game, no sport, no entertainment was complete without her, her voice, her words rang perpetually in his ears. Was this then love? Love for his cousin's wife?

Nicholas had never been a thoroughly bad man, he was only a careless young fellow mixing with the fast women of his acquaintance whom he could not respect. But, Sonia? Ah, Sonia, she was so different, so pure, so beautiful, so noble. She was more like an angel than a woman, she possessed the greatest power over this wayward, self-willed man, she brought out all the best points of his character, and he looking up to her as a superior being, felt that reverence and awe that only such a man can feel. He worshipped her long before he knew it. He loved her, but he must renounce her, for is she not his cousin's wife?

CHAPTER XI.

CALLED TO ACCOUNT.

The days passed by one by one until the Winter came, a real Russian Winter, with plenty of snow and ice.

The mother of Alexis was gradually losing strength, and all felt doubtful if she could live to see another Spring.

It was the last night of Nicholas' stay at his cousin's house, to-morrow he must go to St. Petersburg, for his leave was over.

He and Poleska were pacing up and down the long drawing room, while the others were in a room apart.

"And to-morrow your leave is over," said Poleska, "it seems to me you are in a great hurry to leave us."

"You are mistaken, Poleska, however much I may wish to remain ; my inclination must be subordinate to my duty, you know a soldier's first thought is to obey."

"You will go to new places, new scenes, will see new faces and perhaps, forget the old ones."

“Oh, no, Poleska, there you are wrong. I am afraid you underrate me considerably, I have enjoyed myself thoroughly, in spite of Alexis, since my stay here, but it is a monotonous existence. Do you wonder that now I should long for action.”

“It has always been so,” said Poleska, with a heavy heart. “Men go to war and glory, forgetting everything in the excitement of the moment, while we poor women must wait and weep.”

Nicholas looked at his cousin with a puzzled expression.

“You speak with feeling, Poleska, and yet you are a society girl!”

“And is that a reason one should have no feeling, no pulse, no heart?” asked she, warmly. “In society one must run the gauntlet of the season’s gayeties, but you would find under many a smiling face an aching heart. Society conceals her griefs, and smiles.”

She looked anxiously at Nicholas, but what she sought in his face she did not find. He only smiled quietly, and she began in a quieter strain—

“Nicholas, you were to tell me if you found me all you left me as a little girl. How am I changed?”

“The little girl I left behind me is gone forever. In her place I find a young girl, rich, accomplished and beautiful; but still I miss my little girl.”

“And you regret it?”

“I regret her, sometimes; for, although neither rich, accomplished, nor beautiful, she was at least sincere.”

“And her successor, do you doubt her sincerity?”

"I have not found her as sincere as I should like, yet, but come, shall we not go to our hosts?"

"Not yet, oh, not yet," said the young girl, laying a detaining hand on his arm, "I have something yet to speak to you about, are you tired already?"

"My dear Poleska that could not be, but what have you to say?"

"Sonia, do you not like her, does she not make my uncle a charming wife?"

"Very," answered Nicholas, shortly, afraid of betraying himself.

"You are cold, I love Sonia and you do not like her?"

"Certainly, did you fancy I meant to disparage her?"

"Ah, Nicholas you are a true Voronzoff, and your ambition is your end. Sonia has placed an obstacle between you and your prospective title. Sonia has given the Prince of Voronzoff a son and heir."

After a pause of several moments, Poleska said :

"Nicholas we belong to the grand old family of Voronzoff, you must not forget that, and that you are a soldier; a uniform has always been their favorite dress, the house of Voronzoff is celebrated for its brave and gallant soldiers."

"And also for its beautiful women, but do not be content with looks only, be beautiful in all besides."

There was a pause broken by Poleska saying—

"I must go now Nicholas, grandmamma will be

waiting for me. Good-bye, we will not meet again."

"Good-bye, Poleska, good-bye."

The young girl mounted the stairs, a feeling of disappointment coming over her. She had not gone over two or three steps when Nicholas called her back.

"Poleska," he said, "I cannot let you go like this, we may not meet again for some time, will you not give me your blessing?"

Poleska stood on the landing of the stairs slightly above her companion, looking like a beautiful statue on a pedestal. She stretched out her arms and repeated in a clear ringing voice these words borrowed from the Greek service. "May the blessing of the Lord our God be upon you," and with these words the cousins parted.

* * * * *

Some two weeks after Nicholas' departure, Sonia, Poleska and Alexis were starting out for a brisk walk in the sunshine.

Poor Poleska, her heart had been given entirely to Nicholas, and she discovered her mistake when too late.

"What a glorious afternoon," said Alexis, "I am sure Sonia you will agree with me that it is finer than anything in St. Petersburg."

"Why are you always harping on St. Petersburg, Alexis? I will tell you once for all that I would not exchange all the most exquisite songs of the birds for one of our bands, the vaulted heavens

for the ceiling of a handsome drawing-room, or the soft, beautiful snow for a rich carpet."

"And you, Poleska," asked the Prince, "are you equally incorrigible?"

"I am always very fond of the country, uncle; but perhaps it is a little gloomy this time of year."

"Ah! perhaps so," said Alexis, thoughtfully.

Here a servant informed Alexis that some one wanted to see him. His wife and niece walked back to the house with him.

"We will wait for you, Alexis," Sonia said.

"In the library, sir," said the footman.

Alexis hastened there, and, as he entered, Sonia heard some one say:

"I am not to be put off this time, my friend, and you may tell your friends outside not to wait for you; you may be detained longer than you expect." And, with a disagreeable laugh, Ivan shut the door and Sonia heard no more.

For the first time in many years Alexis, Prince of Voronzoff, and his wife's brother stood face to face. No walk this afternoon for Alexis! Ivan was an able talker, and did his work well. Sonia waited in her sitting-room with a foreboding of fear. One moment she heard the two voices raised in anger, the next all was still. After nearly three hours Alexis emerged; he looked pale and anxious.

"Sonia," he said, taking her hand, I shall be obliged to be out this evening and must leave you soon. While I am gone you and Poleska will be alone. Talk to her Sonia, I fear she still cares something for Nicholas. If she does, speak to her

as only a woman can, tell her he has no religion and no king, and if she still regrets him tell her his secret," as he said the last two words his eyes burned with a strange light. "She must be saved at all events. You will do this for me will you not Sonia?"

"Oh, Alexis, it is very hard, but I will do it if you bid me, but tell me where you are going, to one of your church or state meetings?"

"Yes, I am going to a very important meeting, very important. It is time I was going now, but one thing more I must tell you, Sonia, beware of Nicholas. Good bye," and with these words he kissed his young wife and left the room.

* * * * *

Late that same evening as Sonia and Poleska sat together in the firelight, Sonia's thoughts reverted to her talk with Alexis and she felt it her duty to lead the conversation to Nicholas.

"My dear Poleska," she began, Alexis and I have always your happiness at stake, pardon me if I seem presumptuous, but, have you learned to love Nicholas?"

"Oh, Sonia," cried the girl, with flushing cheeks, "why do you ask me that?"

"Because, dearest, I want to try and help you, you have never known a mother's care, and although I cannot fill that place for you, I love you as my own sister, you are Alexis' sister's child, can you not confide in me?"

“Oh, Sonia, how kind you are, I had thought to hide this from all eyes, oh, I am so miserable, so miserable.”

Sonia was silent and slowly stroked the young girl's hair. Poleska left her seat and placed herself on a stool at Sonia's feet. “I love him Sonia, oh, so much. It is a love that is immeasurable, and yet he cares no more for me. I used to think, but, no, Nicholas is anything but fickle.”

“Poleska, I am very, very sorry to hear this, for you to marry Nicholas is impossible. He is a man no girl should love, his life has not been what it should be.”

“I understand you, Sonia, you refer to his conspiracies. He is a Nihilist, an atheist, but I love him still through it all.”

“What if I should tell you he was double dealing?”

“It is a foul slander. Who dares say so?”

“Your uncle Alexis, himself, oh, Poleska, this is not all, his wife still lives.”

“Oh, Heavens, his what?”

“Strange as it may seem, Nicholas is no longer free. A clandestine marriage binds him in its grasp.”

Poleska's sobs choked her utterance, she flung her head in Sonia's lap, sweet, patient Sonia.

“Oh, Nicholas, Nicholas!” cried Poleska, “is it, can it be true? and I loved you so much, so very much.”

“Be comforted Poleska, you have loved not wisely but too well, Nicholas is not for such as you, he has forfeited his right to you.”

Poleska gradually grew calmer, until, her eyes heavy with tears, she dropped to sleep. Sonia kissed her tenderly as a mother would. In the mean time Alexis' last meeting was over and he lay stretched upon the ground beneath the moon's bright rays, pierced by a duellist's sword. The warm blood flowed from a wound in the side and slowly discolored the white snow. The blood of the haughty Voronzoff was ebbing away and drawing the life of its mighty Prince in its tide. No hand now could check the crimson current ; what were wealth, power, name, in the presence of the dread foe ? Death strikes saint and sinner, prince and pauper, alike, and spares none, and when the church chimes pealed out the half hour slowly on the frosty air, Alexis, Prince of Voronzoff, was no more. The moon passed under a cloud, as if to hide its face from the ghastly sight, and so the weary hours dragged themselves to a close, and when morning dawned they carried him to his beautiful home Daniloviski.

CHAPTER XII.

NIHILIST VIEWS.

It was six years since Alexis, Prince of Voron-zoff, had died by the hand of Ivan Kersoff—a hand raised to avenge all he held most sacred—and Alexis, in the full force of his manhood, vigor and prime; was with one blow made to pay with his life for a youthful folly that had shadowed all his after life.

How he met his death, no one knew; but it was given out that he fell by the road-side while returning from a meeting. His mother never rallied from the shock to her nerves and, before long, she followed her idolized son to the grave.

Sonia was left alone with the child, and had lived at the Daniloviski place until now, six years after her husband's death, she had established herself at a hotel in St. Petersburg, with Mikel, her husband's old servant, as her only attendant.

She would sit in the evening by a fire, with her head between her hands, dreaming of her past life and all that Alexis was to her.

One evening old Mikel came to her. "The Count of Voronzoff," he said.

"I will go," she said ; and for the first time since she had been a widow, Sonia and Nicholas stood face to face.

A great wave of feeling swept over him as he saw her. She was so young, so fair for so much sorrow, while she with Alexis' last words, "Beware of Nicholas," ringing in her ears, felt almost in awe of him, he looked so very handsome as he stood there in his uniform.

"Welcome to St. Petersburg, Sonia," he said ; "I am glad to see you looking so well ; and the little Prince, how is he ?"

"Sergius is very well, Nicholas, and grows every day more like his father, he is all I have to remind me of him now."

Her sadness touched him, and he said gently,

"It was hard, very hard I know, and so sudden too, but you must not let your thoughts dwell too much on the past, for the sake of your son you should look to the future. Remember, that as the Prince of Voronzoff there will be much expected of him."

Sonia trembled. He was so kind, so considerate, and these were the first words of that kind she had heard since the death of Alexis. "My poor little Sergius," she said, the tears starting to her eyes, "sometimes when I think about it and how much my little boy will be responsible for, I wish we were peasants, so that we might have no anxiety."

"And would you give up that ambition that a

mother feels to see her son rich and powerful? There are many who would envy you your position as mother of the Prince of Voronzoff."

"They may spare their envy then, for to me, above all titles and riches I should ask for happiness, for without that what crown is blessed?"

"You talk of happiness as a thing beyond you. Tell me, Sonia, are you not happy?"

"Yes, oh, yes, as happy as I ever can ask to be in this world, now. I would be very ungrateful were I not, as long as I have my child, what else could I ask for. Yes, I am happy, but I am talking too much about myself, tell me of you, how are you getting on? Remember I have heard nothing for so long."

"Things have been the same with me as usual. Time passes quickly in Petersburg where every thing is given over to pleasure and gayeties and riches."

"Are you still—that is—tell me if you are still a conspirator. Do you remember how we talked about it at Daniloviski? Ah, those were happy days," she said wearily.

"Could I forget that? never; those few days were to me as Heaven. I have never been a good man, perhaps; men say my faults have covered my virtues, but those few weeks in the country, far from the bustle and turmoil of the city, did for me what everything else has failed to accomplish, and could I have been there a little longer I might have become a better man than I have been."

"But if you really repent that is half the battle ;

remember I am your monitor, try to give up something for my sake and let me feel that I have done some good, if ever so little."

These words, so softly spoken, nearly made Nicholas betray himself, but he recovered himself with an effort.

"Don't talk of what I can give up, you little know how utterly worthless I am. I have passed through scenes that you have never dreamed of, and I hope you will never know. I, Nicholas Voronzoff, though a Count and a soldier, acknowledge no God and no King."

"No God," cried Sonia, "that is terrible, and no King! Nicholas, you tell me this, now while you are the King's servant, have on the uniform of his guard, you live by him, see him day by day, and yet in your innermost heart are plotting for his ruin. Oh, it is terrible."

"But what can be done, we cannot go on living in the same way we have been doing, the slaves of despotism, millions of lives at the caprice of one man, thousands sent to Siberia every day. Do you think the people can sit tamely by and suffer all this. No, the time will come when they will revolt, overturn Czar and Empire and proclaim themselves the rulers. It will be for the good of Russia; we saw how it worked in France, but the Nihilists are increasing not only in Petersburg alone, they are scattered over all parts of the Empire, and when one is called upon to strike, they ask no questions but do their work promptly and silently."

"Oh, Nicholas, how dreadful, how very terrible,

but what if you should be found out? The Czar deals summarily with Nihilists."

"I would be then only one more victim of a noble cause, and in the bleak steppes of Siberia, I should, like so many others, find a living death, and wait till death came to free me from tyranny."

Sonia involuntarily shuddered, but Nicholas rose to go.

"Don't think of these things, Sonia, but keep up a good heart for the child's sake, and you will let me come again, will you not?"

Sonia could not answer, but bent her head, and soon afterwards Nicholas was gone.

CHAPTER XIII.

FORBIDDEN FRUIT.

After that first visit, Nicholas found his way often to the hotel where Sonia was staying, and they saw almost as much of each other as in the old days at Daniloviski.

Nicholas, Count of Voronzoff, was, according to the world, a dangerous man, but the world does not know a man's inward feelings, and few would have believed the Count capable of his feeling for Sonia. He revered her, worshipped her, almost, and with that instinctive feeling of his would have guarded her from even a thought that would have been harmful to her. Dangerous man he might be, a good man he certainly was not, but his love was genuine and pure as it is capable for us mortals to feel. And so he came again and again, till his love grew too strong for him and he determined to tell her all.

So one evening as they were sitting by the fire, for he had been dining with her, he told her all that had been passing in his mind and heart.

"I love you, Sonia," he said, "Oh, so much, that it is killing me to see you day by day, still as far away as if you were the wife of another. Now you are free, and if you could care for me enough to descend to my rank, I want to make you my wife."

Sonia gazed on him with fear and horror. "You say all this to me, you!" she said.

"I know that you think I have no right to say these things—that you consider yourself pledged to Alexis; but would you spoil my chance of happiness for the love of one long since dead?"

"Long since dead!" exclaimed Sonia. "Oh, Nicholas, I had little thought to hear words as these from your lips! You have fallen low, indeed, to ask my hand after all that has happened."

"But listen, Sonia; you would not force me to perpetual darkness—I, who am so much in need of all your love? Sonia—my Sonia, if I may call you so—smile on me, love me, become my wife, and I will give up all for your sake and will follow where you lead me!"

He advanced toward her, but Sonia waved him back.

"Nicholas, I little thought you would betray my friendship like that. Stand back! oh, that Alexis could protect me now! Do you not know it is an insult to speak to me as you are doing?"

"An insult to tell a woman you love her! An insult to give a woman a love as good and pure as any a god could bless you with! An insult? Sonia,

what can you mean? Surely you or I must be going mad!"

"Nicholas," said Sonia, advancing to him and laying her hand gently on his arm, "you and I have always been friends. You are Alexis' nearest relative, and I would sooner die than believe any evil of you. I thought at least you would spare me such a wrong. Tell me if it is some great mistake, or are you really altogether without conscience?"

"There are hidden meanings in your words," exclaimed Nicholas. "To what you allude I cannot tell. For heaven's sake speak out! Has some base slander reached you of my affairs. Tell me to what you allude, and let me deny it while I may."

"I would give the world to have you deny it, Nicholas, but I fear you cannot. It is my fault if I have gained your love, for I know that your wife is living."

"My wife! good heavens, speak, who told you that?"

"Alexis told me you had a clandestine marriage with some girl beneath you. That your children were your heirs, and, oh, heaven, to think that you would ask me to be your wife!"

Nicholas stood where he had heard these words, rooted to the spot, every vestige of color left his face, his hands clenched and in a voice hard and metallic he said—"Did Alexis say that of me?"

"He told me that a long time ago, and that is why we informed Poleska to keep her from marrying you; oh, Nicholas, I should scold you, but I

pity you so much, so very much, and I know it must have been in a moment of temptation that you married her and ruined all your after life."

Nicholas dropped into a chair by a table and hid his face on his arm. He was completely crushed. No one had ever seen the Count so much moved. Sonia looked at him and her breath came in great gasps, but her eyes were dry. Suddenly he raised himself, "And you believed it of me," he said, his voice stirring hidden depths in her heart.

"Yes, I believed it, Nicholas," she answered.

"Then my life is over," he said, "I must go away, perhaps you will never see me again. I have lost all that makes life worth living, but I love you still, Sonia, and some day you will not think so badly of me. I cannot tell you now, but some day you will learn all and then you will pity me. I had not believed Alexis could tell you such a thing. Good bye, Sonia, if you ever want me—I will send you my address so you can send for me; oh, Sonia, Alexis may have loved you, but not half as much as I have done. You will pray for me, will you not, Sonia? I need it so much, say good-bye from me to Sergius, the only one whose love has not brought me unhappiness, and try not to think any worse of me than you can," and with these words he left the room, and Nicholas' dream of bliss was over. His cousin's hatred struck him from the grave, his cousin stood between him and the woman he loved after six years had passed over his grave, separating them as much as if he had been living. A house divided against itself brings only unhap-

piness on all who come in contact with it, and it seemed as if Ivan's curse was beginning to come true.

CHAPTER XIV.

VILE ACCUSATIONS.

From the time of Nicholas's departure, trouble came once again to Sonia. In the first place, Sergius was ill and, although Sonia thought nothing of this, the little boy grew rapidly worse so that his condition was alarming.

While matters were at this crisis, a stranger called on Sonia. The woman seemed of one of the lower classes, and was clad in deep mourning.

"You have come at a very unfortunate time," said Sonia, "for my little boy is very ill; but I can spare you a few minutes, if you will state your business briefly."

"My business is more with you than with myself. I have come to you for justice. I have been too long kept in the background; but now, come what will, I must speak. Do you know that you are keeping a woman's rights from her? Did Alexis find himself duped by your pretty face? He showed taste, but he forgot at that time that I am Princess of Voronzoff."

“You!” exclaimed Sonia. “Oh, no; you are mistaken! If you are the wife of Nicholas, I will do all in my power to help you; but do not again let the name of the Prince of Voronzoff pass your lips!”

“Nicholas my husband? Oh, no, the Count is the friend that betrayed us, but Alexis, Prince of Voronzoff, was my husband, and now I have come to you to demand my rights. He loved and married me before he ever saw your face, my pretty fool. Ah, how happy we were for three short months—three short months of an existence is a very little time for happiness. Then he left me for his gay capital. He went back to his old life and I was left alone; when I asked for money he grew cross and sullen; he was ashamed of me. Oh, that I should ever have lived to see him so. I went to him one night; I and my child were starving, yes, actually starving, while he lived in his palace with a retinue of servants. I went to him and begged money to buy bread. I showed him my child, his child, thin and dying, and he turned me from the door and I was left in the cold and snow alone, while Alexis went back to his life of pleasure. The poor little babe died in my arms, died from exposure and want, and I was left, through no fault of my own, to an existence worse than death. What right had he, what right, I say, to take an innocent girl from her happy home and then leave her so that her own parents are ashamed to recognize her?”

Sonia was looking at her spell-bound, her face as white as death.

"This is a lie," she said, hoarsely and with an effort. "Do you think the world would believe your story?"

"It rests with you if the world will ever know it or not. It would sound well, would it not, for Alexis, Prince of Voronzoff, to be accused of bigamy? I can defame his character, spoil your life, my lady, as you have already spoiled mine, and let that child you speak of blush to own his father. Oh, you cold heartless nobles, you little know all we suffer by you."

"Woman," Sonia cried, "enough of this, your proofs, where are your proofs?"

"I took good care of that," answered the woman, "here is a letter to me from your loving husband first."

Sonia took the letter mechanically, and it was with an effort that she read it. It began—"My own darling, Anna," and ended, "your affectionate husband," and then the well known signature—it was his writing beyond doubt. Sonia dropped her hands and crushed the letter in an agony of despair.

"You may destroy that one," said the woman, "for I have plenty more, waste of time, wasn't it? And here is my marriage certificate, look, there is his name, do you believe now?"

Sonia felt as if she were about to faint, her limbs refused to hold her and she sank into a chair at this second proof.

“I believe you, bold, wicked woman,” she said, “that you are the wife of the Count, for my husband told me so himself.”

“Only another ruse to blind you; the Prince hated his cousin and took that form of revenge. You see I took good care to have my proofs, now I come to my business—the world need never know the Prince was my husband, as no one knows but you, and my mouth will be closed on one condition; give me some money; my silence is to be bought.”

“Buy my husband’s honor! No, you are an impostor! Go, I have listened too long to your vile accusations.”

“I go then, my lady, and before to-morrow night Petersburg will be ringing from one end to the other with the Prince’s name coupled with mine.”

“No, no, that shall not be, do you swear that certificate is genuine?”

“I will swear by all I hold most sacred that I am the only and lawful wife of Alexis, Prince of Voronzoff.”

“And your object is money?”

“Yes, my object is money.”

“Name your price?”

The woman named a fabulous sum but still Sonia wavered, her breath came in quick, short gasps.

“Woman,” she said, “I will give you twice that sum and will beggar myself if you will swear all your story is a fabrication and the certificate is false.”

The woman's eyes gleamed, she wavered, then drawing a heavy sigh she said :

“Do not tempt me to such baseness. I loved Alexis too much to deny him now. I swear again that he is and was my lawful husband.”

Sonia heaved a deep sigh, counted out the money, and the woman departed.

She sank down on a couch and gave way to a paroxysm of sobs, her very reason seemed shattered. “Nicholas ! Nicholas,” rang on the air, but he came not and there was none to witness her intense suffering. Soon she arose pale and white, and taking out Nicholas' address with trembling fingers sent him a peremptory summons.”

“Oh, Alexis, Alexis, if this be true I cannot bear it. Nicholas, Nicholas, come, for God's sake come for I am so unhappy.”

Then she went in the little fellow's room and found him raving and delirious. All night long in that darkened room he struggled between life and death, and when morning came worn out and exhausted he fell asleep.

CHAPTER XV.

ANOTHER CALLED.

The first glimpse of a cold gray dawn broke over St. Petersburg when Nicholas entered it, having flown from the other side of the Continent at Sonia's call. She met him in the hall-way.

"Oh, Nicholas," she cried, "thank God you have come, I feared you would be too late for Sergius. Come, he is sleeping, but oh, what a night," and she sighed wearily.

"I came as soon as I could, but you look tired and wan, lie down for a little while and I will call you if—if—that is—if anything is needed."

She tried to smile and with a weary "Thank you, Nicholas," she turned away and he entered the chamber of sickness.

Prepared as Nicholas was for a great change, he was struck by the pallor of the face on the pillow. As he stood looking down at him, thinking of his dead cousin, the child suddenly awoke and seeing who was looking at him, turned toward him with a gleam of intelligence on his poor wan little face, and clutched at his cousin convulsively.

“Nicholas, Nicholas,” he whispered, “I am so glad you came. I wanted to see you so much, if only once more before I die.”

“But you must not die, my Sergius, you are too young and too good, you have often been sick before.”

“But never like this, this is worse than all, and mamma looks so sad, oh, it is dreadful—” he paused for a moment then went on, “Nicholas, Nicholas, where are you?”

“Here, my boy, close to you.”

“It is so dark here, give me your hand so that I shall not be afraid. Do you remember how they used to tell me that I had taken your title away from you? It was always a pity, I thought, but you will now be the Prince of Voronzoff after all. You used to want it so much, and when I think of that somehow it does not seem so hard to die after all.”

The child slept on now for he had grown very weak, and Nicholas was left to his own thoughts, and bitter thoughts they were, too, of all his past life, for seeing that little child brought him very near to death.

The day passed on very drearily and as all the rest of that gay city was searching for pleasure and gayety, that one little boy was fighting, oh, so hard, for his poor little life. Of what avail was it now that he was Prince of Voronzoff. Who could keep him now? And as once before a Prince of that noble house was struck by death, so now another

victim was ready for the call, and father and son would soon be together.

“Nicholas,” moaned the boy suddenly rousing, “what was the prayer I used to say? How did it go? I forget so now, I never used to, tell me so that I can remember it.”

Nicholas gave a start. He had given up prayers long ago, but the soft, pleading voice was not to be silenced. Slowly and very painfully the Count repeated the prayer that awoke so many tender memories in his mind. Memories of a past so long ago that the young soldier had believed them forgotten long ere this, of a mother’s love, a happy home, and perfect trust that a life-time of gayeties and frivolities cannot wholly efface from the book of time. Now, as he repeated the simple, childish prayer, these memories came flitting over him, and, strong soldier man of the world as he was, his voice trembled, and hot scalding tears came to his eyes. He wept? Yes, the strong man by the bed-side of the little child, wept tears of humiliation and remorse. Scoffers may laugh at such things and call it weakness. Oh, my friends, if you could not weep at such a time, I pity you! Those tears were sacred, wrung as they were from a man’s best feeling—coming direct from the heart; no man that is utterly lost could shed such tears as these.

The little voice grew weaker and weaker, and Nicholas had to bend very low to catch the wavering breath.

“Mamma,” whispered the child, “you will take

care of her, won't you ? She will have no one when I am gone ; you will try, won't you, for my sake ?”

“ Yes, yes child, but don't worry about these things ; it makes you weaker.”

“ But you will promise, won't you ? Say just once you promise to take care of mamma.”

“ I promise, Sergius, to do all in my power for her.”

“ I am so glad, so glad,” he murmured, “ that I was in time,” then after another pause, “ I never thought I should die so soon, I am so young yet, only seven you know and there is so much to live for. I often wonder what it will be like up there, it seems so dark and far off. I wish you were going with me, it is lonesome, going all alone, but I shall see papa and tell him how kind you have been. Come nearer, nearer yet, oh, Nicholas, don't let me die, keep me here, I don't want to leave everything behind me. Mamma, Nicholas !” then he stopped, he turned over on his side and Nicholas thought he had gone to sleep. Strong man that he was, hardened to sights of the dead and dying on the battle-field, he could not stand the sight of his poor little cousin's suffering.

The child was fond of him, the only thing in his life that was fond of him, and now he was dying, dying, and Sonia would be left alone. At the thought of Sonia he trembled ; this was her child and he could not save him. Suddenly in the stillness of the sick room a feeling of great calm came over him ; he felt all, that there must be a God after all. He seemed so near, so very near, the

whole room seemed filled with His presence, and Nicholas bowed his head and prayed as he had not prayed for many days. All his sins, his failings, his temptations he poured out and prayed humbly for grace and for forgiveness. He never knew how long he prayed, for after a time, he, being exhausted by his long journey, fell asleep in his chair and slept until late. Sergius slept on and the stillness in the room was intense. Soon Sonia came to find them, the quiet causing her heart a great bound of fear. She entered, passed Nicholas, who was still sleeping, and went to Sergius. One glance at his face, one touch of his hand, and with a wild shriek that was heard through the house, she fell upon the floor. Nicholas awoke with a start, and ran to his little cousin's side. Too late, the hand of death was already there, the youngest branch of the house of Voronzoff was riven from the tree. Ivan's curse had fallen on that mighty house, riches, name and rank, now were of no avail, the little boy had gone to join Alexis; father and son were together waiting on the farther shore; for Sergius, Prince of Voronzoff, had breathed his last.

CHAPTER XVI.

AMOUR OMNIA VINCIT.

The story is now soon told. Several days after the death of Sergius, Mikel came to Sonia.

"The Prince of Voronzoff, your highness." Sonia was astonished.

"Do you not know, Mikel," she said, "that the Prince of Voronzoff is dead?"

"Yes, your highness," said the old man, a flush of pride coming into his withered cheek, "but the Prince of Voronzoff has lived—has lived in Russia for the past two hundred years."

Sonia gave a start.

"It is Nicholas," she said, "and Prince of Voronzoff; bid him come in."

When Nicholas saw her, he was startled, for so much grief had left its mark on Sonia, and the last few days were trying ones.

"You have come," she said, "at a time when I most need you; let us get back to Daniloviski as soon as possible. The city has lost all attraction for me," and she sank into a chair.

Who would have known this careworn looking woman for the lovely bride of eight short years ago, but Nicholas preferred her more as she was now, for her sorrows had passed by her leaving marks of suffering but of sweetness on her face, and her character was strengthened by her experiences.

They laid Sergius at rest in his father's tomb at Daniloviski, the tiny coffin laid beside his father's and grandfather's, and Nicholas had had his heart's desire, he was the Prince at last.

"You are the Prince of Voronzoff," Sonia said to him, "nothing now stands between you and your ambition, the Prince of Voronzoff at last."

Nicholas flushed at these words. "And will you like me less as the Prince than as the Count? The Count had many faults that the Prince will endeavor to atone for."

Sonia sighed.

"If the Prince is as good a friend to me as the Count was I shall be satisfied."

Not long after this, Sonia still doubting the woman's story about Alexis, went herself to see the church register in the little country church. Nicholas was standing beside her and as he saw the hot flush mount to her brow, he said, "Now do you believe?"

"Oh, Nicholas, it is so terrible, and you, you lead me to believe it was yourself, how could you leave me to think that of you?"

"Because I loved you," answered the Prince, simply. That was all he said, but Sonia with tears

in her eyes felt how strong his love must have been to kill his own happiness that she might believe her husband's memory untarnished. She saw by the register that the marriage had taken place ten years ago, when Nicholas was in Siberia, commanding a military post, it must have been Alexis, and only two years before her own marriage.

"And you knew it all along!" she said.

"Yes," he answered, slowly, "all along."

"But their letters,—they wrote to one another—where are they?"

"I burned them, so that you should never know."

"And yet you hated Alexis."

"Yes, I hated him; but he has answered for his sins long ere this."

So he was married! He had deceived her, yet she had trusted him so much! The young widow struggled with herself to renounce his memory; she was no longer his widow. Who was she, only Sonia Valovitch after all, and with a struggle she cast his memory from her.

But there was another image that had taken possession of her heart, that, strive as she would, she could not rid herself of. "He was kind to my little boy," she murmured, "and I am going away soon and he will forget me," but even as she says it, two large tears well up in her eyes. Tears came so easily to Sonia, then.

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It was a soft, warm day, in early Spring, the first of the year, bringing many promises to those tired of the long Russian Winter. Sonia was going to church—the same little village church where she and Nicholas had gone together on that Summer's day, now so long ago—and as she thinks of it, she heaves a sigh which changes into a sad smile, as Nicholas appears and says, looking down at her :

“ May I not come too ? ”

They walk the remainder of the way in silence and enter the church. What memories it brings to Sonia. The short simple service is soon over and the priest dismissed the congregation.

As they walk home in the clear morning air, the birds are singing and all nature seems in gladness to throw off the sombre cloak of winter.

Nicholas had entered into the service at the little church, not as an onlooker, as before, but as a member.

Now as they walk home he turns to Sonia—

“ You have done so very, very much for me, I can never repay you, you once told me you would try and make me better and you have succeeded better than you could ever have hoped for.”

“ I am so glad,” said Sonia, “ I can now feel that I have at least done some good, but Nicholas, I must tell you one thing. Don't think too badly of me, but it was I who turned Poleska against you. I told her you were already married. I believed it then, and now—Oh, I have spoiled your life, can you forgive me for it ? ”

"I forgive you Sonia, willingly, for you did not know the harm you were doing me, but forget it all now for it is past and gone."

"And then your kindness to my little boy, my poor little Sergius, that child loved you so very much, even in his raving he called your name. I have no longer any right or any place here, you are the Prince of Voronzoff now, the woman, his widow. I shall go away very soon, leave this place where I have been so happy and you will soon forget me, but I can never fail to remember all your kindness to me and mine."

They were on their own grounds now, and as they walked under the old trees Nicholas began,

"Sonia, could you learn to love me well enough to become once more Princess of Voronzoff for me? I love you too well to bear to think of your leaving me, now that happiness is beginning to smile upon me. You said that I was ambitious and so I am, but the Prince of Voronzoff is nothing to me unless you share my title, my home, my heart. I told you of my love once before, but then a stain was upon my name which has been removed now, though not by my hands. I love you so much Sonia, and I have waited these many, many years to make you all mine own, the fates have decreed that nothing should stand between us, there is nothing wanting but your answer to knit our hearts together." Then Sonia looked up, her lips trembled and with a cry she sprang towards him. He caught her in his arms and held her passionately to his heart that beat only for her. Happy Sonia, to have gained the

love of that brave, noble soldier, that kind, generous friend, Russia's noblest Peer, Nicholas, Prince of Voronzoff. "May the blessing of the Lord thy God be upon thee."

The Last of the Saint Reaults.

CHAPTER I.

LOVE.

It was a soft, balmy evening in fair Brittany—Brittany, the home of the poet and the artist—Brittany, the fairest jewel in the crown of France ! It had been a fete day, and the streets were thronged with peasants returning to their homes.

On an eminence overlooking the bay, and seen from the whole village, stood the chateau of Saint Reault, that lordly mass of granite that had defied so many generations ; for the Saint Reaults were a very old family and had the true Breton spirit, whether shown in council or in the field.

On this particular evening, as the moon rose, she cast her light on two figures walking in the chateau grounds. How many times since the old chateau had stood there had lovers wandered through the grounds, the same moon shining on all !

As the lovers stand now let us draw a picture of

them. The girl, for so she seemed, was tall and slight, a very type of the old Breton who had lived here for so many, many years, the lovely daughter of the brave old warriors, whose tales of war and daring she had heard from the peasants in her native village.

Where are they now, those brave Bretons and France's best champions? Dead and gone, and now only six feet of earth is enough to cover them while the memory of their brave deeds will live in Brittany forever. All gone? Yes, Brittany knows them no more and the line will end with this fair blossom, for Marguerite de Saint Reault is the last representative of that old noble line.

Her companion is a dark, handsome man with no look of the Breton, a soldier stationed in the little town of Reault who has dared to love the fair Marguerite.

"And is this to be the end of all our happiness," the girl asks, despairingly, "is this old town no more to see your form or hear your voice? this chateau will be indeed dreary without you, must I because I love you, lose you—so soon?"

"Marguerite," answered her companion, "be strong, be brave, it is true I am ordered to Paris, to-morrow I am going, but wait patiently for me and I will return to make you my bride."

"Wait! this is a word unknown to my race, the Saint Reaults know not to wait. Take me with you let us share a common fortune and I promise you you shall hear no complaint from my lips."

"It cannot be, oh, my darling, a soldier's life

would be too hard on you ; we love, let that suffice and if we are true to one another, no one can come between us."

"But such a long, long time to wait, oh, Fernand the world is cruel, men go away to fight and women wait and weep, how can I bear it?"

"Think of me fighting for you, gaining a name that may be worthy of you. Marguerite de Saint Reault you are the daughter of a noble race, I, but a soldier of fortune, but I love you Marguerite, more than my life, promise me never, never to forget me."

"Oh, Fernand, as if I could, my love, my life."

"Promise, Marguerite, that you will marry no other till I return, promise to be faithful always, as you love me."

Then in low, solemn tones the girl answered : "I promise."

"Remember the motto of your house, 'Faithful unto Death;' that shall be our motto in the long years of watching and waiting, that are to come : faithful to each other, faithful even unto death."

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The next morning there was a great excitement in Reault, for the King had ordered the troops to Paris and all was in readiness for marching.

Marguerite had gone to the village to see them depart, and now she was having a farewell conversation with her soldier-lover as she buckled on his sword.

“Marguerite, my love, my darling,” he said, closing her in his arms, “we part to meet again, think only of me as striving to gain a place and name which I can give you without lowering you in the world’s esteem. Oh, this terrible rank and nobility, it creates only discord and inharmony. If I had my way, each man should be as equal as the other, has he not the same body and the same soul? where then is the difference, a king is only mortal.”

“Hush, Fernand what words are these, is not the king our ruler, are not we his subjects?”

“France has had a king too long, too long has she submitted to his tyranny, the time is not far off when we shall of all men be free,—or die.”

These last two words were almost whispered, but Marguerite shuddered.

“Oh, no,” she said, “you must not die, not only does France want you, but—”

“Forward,” shouted the Commander, “March!”

The band struck up a stirring tune, the banner of France waved in the breeze, the column advanced.

Fernand strained Marguerite to his heart.

“Courage!” he whispered, “our time will soon come, and remember—”

“Faithful unto death,” she said, with a long-drawn sigh.

He fell into line. The troops were already marching. He gave her one last look; then in the fair Breton sunshine they parted.

The young girl watched them as they wound in

and out among the trees of the village road, till the music ceased, and they were gone.

Only a bare road to show where they had gone ; only a girl standing there in the road, the sunlight playing about her form ; only this, and yet two hearts far away that night were struggling with fate, as with a heavy heart. And, choked between a sigh and a sob, Marguerite de Saint Reault turned and went her way to the solitary chateau, leaving hope behind her.

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Time wore on, and in sunny Brittany the storms that shook France to its centre were almost unknown, so fair and tranquil as it seemed.

Two years had elapsed since Marguerite and her lover had parted. Two long years to the girl, grown now through despair and love to be a woman, for in that time no word had arrived from Fernand—no message of love, or even of sympathy, from him who had her heart.

Hope succeeded hope till, as the time wore on and brought no word, a calm, maddening despair seemed to overcome her, and in her dreams she saw always a young soldier lying on the ground dying, with her name on his lips. Poor soul, how could she know that Paris was undergoing a terrible experience, that communication with the outer world was cut off, and that each soldier in that city was doing the work of three men to save their city from utter ruin !

But the worst had not come—only the beginning of that great strife that was to echo from one end of the world to the other.

At the end of September, two years from the scene in the moonlit garden, a stranger came to the chateau. A man past the prime of life, but for all that a peer of France, Eugene Louis Auguste, Duc de Chinon, of a long line of noblemen.

He no sooner saw Marguerite than he loved her, loved her with all the passion of his ardent French nature, and it was not long before he saw that he loved in vain, for the beautiful fair daughter of the brave Saint Reaults was cold as a marble statue.

Marguerite and her aged grandfather were the only inhabitants of the old chateau, and the Duc offered his suit to the old grandfather and together they arranged it that Marguerite should become the Duc's wife.

"My dear," said her grandfather to her, "the Duc is in every way worthy of you, and as for me I shall soon be numbered with my fathers. He shall be your husband, for a long time have I waited to find one suitable to wed with a Saint Reault, he has come at last, my last hours will be crowned with happiness."

Marguerite replied to this with a storm of tears, and all the stubborn wilful pride of her race rose within her at these words.

"Anything but that," she moaned, "anything but that."

"But you foolish child," replied the old man,

proudly, "he loves you, where could you find one as true and brave?"

"But grandfather I have no love to give him in return."

"He has not asked for it, my child, be a good wife and love will come in due time."

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Not long after this there was a grand wedding celebrated at the chateau. The daughter of the Saint Reaults was to marry one of the greatest peers of France.

The chateau was in festive attire, never had it looked so grand as it stood in the sunshine, while from its tower waved the banner of the Saint Reaults with its motto, familiar to all in the village, "Faithful unto Death."

The peasantry was drawn around the chateau door dressed in their best, waiting for a view of the bride.

The great doors opened, the bridegroom stood there, the peasants cheered, the music sounded, the bridegroom looked flushed and triumphant, the bride ashen pale, for as she stood there she realized that though she had given her hand to the Duc de Chinon, her heart was with Fernand Montserret.

CHAPTER II.

WAR.

The Duc de Chinon and his fair young wife were in their apartments in Paris. Not the gay, light-hearted Paris we love to think of, but a heart-broken Paris, weeping tears of blood through the streets for her brave sons who perished for her.

All about was chaos, everyone his own master, the city ran with blood, and the infuriated mob with the fury of a wild beast crying for more blood, ransacked the city for fresh victims.

The guillotine stood in the beautiful Place de la Concorde like a spectre of revenge, and at all hours of the day and night troops were marching, bands playing, and with a deafening applause every new victim's decapitation was greeted by the mob.

Such was Paris to the innocent young girl brought from her carefully guarded Southern home of sunny France.

"Oh, Eugene," she said, now turning to her husband with the hopelessness of despair, "cannot we go away somewhere and leave all this terror behind us, it is killing us both? All day long I hear the

shouts and the screams of the mobs and in my dream even their wild haggard faces haunt me, let us go while there is still time."

"The time is past now for retreat," answered the Duc, "we must wait here patiently to the bitter end, it is an evil day when Frenchman turns against Frenchman and France's own sons are her destroyers."

"But surely it cannot last, they have put so many to death already."

"And so it will go on, till the nobility being all gone they will fall upon one another. The nobles are almost all gone already, but while they last we wait patiently for our call, it may come any minute, who can say, but we wait patiently knowing that when the stroke descends we pass from the dread scenes to a life beyond."

The young duchesse shuddered, and drew closer to her husband while even then steps were heard on the stairs.

"They have come," he said, in a low voice.

Marguerite, terrified, cowed in a corner, and the door being burst open the soldiers entered.

"Eugene Louis Auguste Chinon, you are my prisoner," said one, "by the order of the Grand Council."

"I am ready," said the Duc, slowly, "only one word to my wife, Marguerite."

"I will go with you," she said, "they can kill me too."

"No, no, *ma chere*," cried the husband, then turning to the soldier, "will nothing save me?"

“ Say, ‘ Vive la Republique ;’ and you are free.”

The Duc looked at Marguerite steadily a moment, then said, “ Vive le Roi.”

The soldier laughed, then said :

“ March forth. Come prisoner, there is no time to lose, make your adieux quickly, for the justice has many prisoners to interview before night.”

“ When is it to be ?” asked the Duc, calmly.

“ To-night, in the public square. Come on.”

“ Marguerite,” said the unfortunate man, “ take this and wear it for my sake.”

And he threw over her head, and hung on her breast a miniature of the King, surrounded by brilliants, attached by the white ribbon, with the gold “ Fleurs de Lis ” of the Bourbon Kings.

“ Time is up,” said the leader, “ prisoner, march, citoyenne you are not to leave till to-morrow when the house will be demolished ; so much for the justice’s softness, between now and to-morrow you can escape.”

Hardly hearing, Marguerite clung with tears and sobs to her husband. and when finally she was torn away she sank exhausted to the floor.

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When Marguerite arose it was already dusk and hastily rising she looked about her. How empty the house looked now that Eugene had gone, perhaps for ever, oh, what *could* she do, she must save him or else—a soldier in the hall entered.

"Citoyenne," he said, "why do you not escape? The hour is near at hand for the execution."

"I cannot go and leave my husband to irretrievable ruin. Tell me who is the justice who condemned him; I will go to him and intercede for the unhappy Duc."

"It will be of no use; he would not see you."

"But tell me his name that I may seek him."

"Go, then, and you have only to ask the way from any one in the streets, for all know Fernand Montserret."

"Fernand Montserret—good heavens!—my husband's accuser?"

"A brave and noble man; do you know him?"

"Take me to him, quick! Every moment is fraught with danger; oh, to be in time! Fernand Montserret, spare me this unhappiness, and I will bless you forever!"

Marguerite threw a shawl over her head and shoulders and, with her guard, passed into the streets. They passed through all the crowds, for his uniform was recognized by all.

"Here we are," he said, pausing, "who shall I say is without?"

"The Duchesse de Chinon."

"There are no Duchesses now, one man is as good as another."

"You speak so to me," said Marguerite, with flashing eyes, "Fernand Montserret shall punish you." Pass on, I follow you."

They entered the room together, and Marguerite

pushed forward to where a man sat at a table writing, her shawl drawn well about her.

"Fernand Montserret I plead an audience."

He looked up enquiringly at the soldier.

"Who is this?" he said.

"Another noble," answered the soldier with a sneer, then withdrew.

"My good woman do you not know that you were very rash in coming here? you are completely in my power, I can take you prisoner and have you guillotined."

"I did not think of my own safety in coming here," answered Marguerite, "only of my husband whom you have cruelly condemned to die. What has he ever done to you that you should take an innocent life."

"He has done nothing by himself, but France has suffered too long the tyranny of these selfish nobles, that now we are reaping the fruits of the seeds they sowed through despotism, avarice and profligacy, your husband cannot be saved."

He returned to his writing, but Marguerite with gleaming eyes stepped closer to him.

Fernand Montserret, if ever you have loved have mercy now on an unfortunate woman. I have suffered too long from your wrongs not to feel a bitterness, learn now from the lips of one who once loved you that all now is over, for Marguerite de Saint Reault stands before you."

She dropped the shawl.

"Marguerite de Saint Reault! Am I dreaming,

my love, my darling. I am yours for ever," and he knelt at her feet.

"No, no, Fernand you shall not kneel to me, I am the wife of another, one who this moment dies by your hand."

"Good Heavens ! your husband. My darling I love you so much, be mine now till eternity."

"Stand back, the Duchesse de Chinon commands you, I am the wife of another."

"The wife, oh, mon Dieu, the wife of another. Marguerite you have broken your promise, while I, I thought you honorable."

"Do not use such words as these, Fernand, an unhappy woman was made a sacrifice for her parent's will. No word came from you, my happiness was over, so I accepted the hand my grandfather gave me."

"A plot, a conspiracy to rob me of all I held most dear, fool that I was to leave you with that old man"—

"Hush, Fernand, grandfather is dead and cannot defend himself. I am thankful he never lived to see France rended by civil war. Oh, my poor grandfather !"

"You should not complain ; you are a Duchesse now, while I—"

"Am the justice I have come to for mercy, not as becomes my rank, but grovelling in the dust at your feet, where you have leveled me and my rank. Oh, save him ! Save my husband, ere it is too late !"

The gun sounded outside. The crowd, with one

accord, gave a fiendish yell, which sounded with all its force into the room.

"It is over!" he cried, "now no one can come between us. You are mine—mine only, until death! Keep your promise, for now you are free—free—free!"

At this moment, a solemn knock was heard at the door.

"Oh, hide me!" she cried. "Don't let those terrible men touch me. They are coming; hide me, quick!"

Quick as thought he opened a door, and Marguerite and her shawl were put in and the door closed upon them.

Fernand opened the door and armed men approached.

"Well," he said, calmly.

"Fernand Montserret, your hour is come; you are our prisoner!"

"What!" cried he—"what do I hear! Where are your orders?"

"Oh, we have the best of orders. Come along; some one else will have to be justice now."

"What are your charges?" Fernand asked.

"Plotting with the Royalists, denial is useless, so come along, the guillotine is ready."

"This was too much for Marguerite, she burst upon the men with one arm uplifted while her voice rang loud and clear above the tumult without.

"How dare you make this false accusation, you, his friends, have you turned traitor? Fernand Montserret loves justice as well as liberty."

“Who are you?” asked one of the soldiers, “ah, ha, I thought so, a Royalist, what badge is this? down with tyranny,” and pulling the miniature from Marguerite’s neck he threw it to his feet in atoms.

“And so we will do with every Royalist that comes in our way, vive la Republique, make way there for the prisoner. And so for the second time Marguerite and Fernand had met and parted.

He was gone, her home was ruined by this time, where could she go? What do to save him whom she loved? No use to plead with officials, only one course lay before her and that was stratagem. But nature was imperative and as Marguerite was about to execute her design she fell heavily to the floor in a deadly swoon.

There the concierge found her, and laying her on an unused bed left her in all the agonies of a terrible fever.

Fernand was always on her lips, and all the woman could learn of him was, she was going to save him; how, she knew not, but she must save him ere it was too late; then she heard the fiendish yells of the mobs, and some one said, “it is over;” then his face, set with death, looking imploringly at her.

CHAPTER III.

VICTORY.

For three days Marguerite lay and tossed with the fever, on the fourth she was better, and on the fifth, feeling almost well. She arose, dressed with nervous haste, fear lending wings to her nimble fingers.

“What if I am too late!” she whispered to herself, and hurried with redoubled zeal.

What disguise should she assume? An old peasant would be best. Looking in the deserted rooms for an appropriate costume, she came upon what was once a monk’s cloak. She seized this eagerly, and put it on, kissing it as she did so.

“Now I can save him, if there is yet time. Thank heaven for this disguise! Oh, Fernand, I can now keep my promise, ‘Faithful unto death.’”

Some little time after, a bent, decrepit old monk was asking admission to the prison.

“Who are you seeking?” was asked him.

“Fernand Montserret. Is he here?”

“He is; but a dangerous political prisoner. He can see no one; state your errand.”

“Alas ! my errand is to the souls of men, not their bodies. I am only a poor old monk that he was kind to in the days of his prosperity.”

After some more parleying on both sides, the jailor gave way.

“You shall see him for a few moments,” he said, as he was taking down his huge key, “only make it brief.”

“How soon does he die ?” asked the monk.

“To-day, noon. Follow me.”

They went through a narrow passage way of stone and up a flight of steps, where the jailor paused.

“Here he is,” he said and turned the key in the door.

The room was dark, and as the monk advanced a figure came out of the shadow on the wall into the light.

“Who are you seeking ?” he said.

“Fernand Montserret, you are saved,” said the monk.

“Who are you ?” he asked starting back.

“Marguerite Chinon, who has periled her life to free you.”

And throwing off her disguise she stood before him.

“My own, my darling. God bless you for this,” and his emotion choked his utterance.

“Fernand, the time may yet come when we shall be happy, but quick, slip on this disguise, so that you may pass out without detection.”

She threw the cloak over his shoulders and the cowl over his face.

"You were to be guillotined to-day at noon and I have saved you. Oh, Fernand, I feared I should be too late. Now, when the jailor calls, you can go out."

"And you?" he asked, confused.

"I shall be Fernand Montserret. Have no fear, for you will be soon free."

"But you, my life, my darling, I cannot leave you here alone."

Before Marguerite could reply the jailor was heard calling:

"Time is up, come forth from the cell of Fernand Montserret."

The door was opened just enough for the monk's figure to pass through, and before Fernand could realize it at all he found himself once more in the street, the light of day around him, and realized, in that moment of ecstasy with which prisoners always greet their freedom, that he had left all that was worth living for behind him. Was Marguerite, now that nothing stood between them, to be killed by a headsman and that to save him?

With a shudder he drew himself together, and proceeded to find his friends and followers, for he had conceived a very bold scheme.

* * * * *

Meanwhile, Marguerite, alone in her cell, to which her love had consigned her, was preparing for the

soi-disant execution. She knew that Fernand would never let her die if he could help it, so the strong Breton soul, with that faith which surpasses all science, was calmly waiting for the hour to draw near.

But time passed quicker than she realized, and soon the summons came. She quickly placed his military hat on her head and drawing the long military cloak closely around her she was ready.

No one noticed that she was not Fernand Montserret, but some of the prisoners stared unmercifully at her until she had to hang her head.

Was this the gay Duchesse de Chinon? who had been so happy with her husband only a few short days ago, but now each day was an eternity to miserable Paris. Was she not happier by far now, saving by her own life the life of one whom she loved best in the whole world? "Faithful unto death."

Yes, faithful indeed she was and unto death it seemed, for death stared her in the face, and with all the old Saint Reault courage, she waited for it, unflinchingly.

Still, as the moments, each one an eternity to her, dragged slowly by, her hopes fell one by one with the minutes, till she was on the brink of despair.

"Fernand Montserret," called out the executioner.

No one moved. The cry died away, but Marguerite was turned to stone, she had not faltered before, now all power left her.

"Fernand Montserret !" called out in a louder tone the executioner.

Marguerite looked around on the fair sunny scene she was about to lose forever. Then, ashen pale, she stepped forward, at the same time letting the cloak drop from her, revealing her dress.

"What is this ?" cried the executioner, angrily, "what trick is this ? woman, where is Fernand Montserret ?"

"Where you cannot get at him. He is, thank God, safe now, do your worst !"

"You then are in his place, we will guillotine you."

"Very well ; I am ready. I am not afraid to die. I am waiting, strike !"

As she says these words and turns to mount the guillotine steps, the stirring tones of the Marseillaise is heard, and a troop of horsemen advance to the foot of the guillotine. In a moment Marguerite recognized her lover.

"So, Fernand Montserret, you have come back," cried the executioner. "You are just in time, the guillotine is one victim short."

"Then it shall not be so long ; seize that man," he cried to the soldiers. "And if he resists, kill him ; Fernand Montserret is himself again."

The mob, ever fickle, cheered at this and cried, "down with the executioner ! Down with tyranny ! Vive la Republique, vive la Commune !" And twenty swords pierced the body of the unfortunate executioner.

The mob, ever ready for fresh victims, howled

and cheered, steeped their handkerchiefs in the blood, and yelled till they were hoarse.

"Now," cried Fernand, "who will that I should die? Strike, if you will, now, and let me die for my country here, where I stand, for men can never say Fernand Montserret fears his countrymen."

No man's hand stirred; only renewed shouts of "Vive la Republique! Vive Montserret! Down with tyranny and power!"

Fernand now turned to Marguerite—

"We are safe, Marguerite; safe from all the dangers that beset our path; and henceforth we shall be parted no more, but united forever. We have come through danger to each other, and each has proven the other true and faithful. Marguerite, so far I have brought you nothing but sorrow and fear, but henceforth the future will be only brighter from having seen only the under side. The streets of Paris are running red with the blood of both our friends; each has done well and each has suffered. Forgive me if I have been the means of destroying your kinsmen, but I thought only of France's welfare and not my own. The struggle is now nearly over; my duty here is ended. Let us leave Paris for Brittany and forget all that has just happened; and remember only that we love each other and France, our common country."

He ceased, and Marguerite looking up trustfully into his face knew that her happiness had come at last.

The next day saw them speeding to Brittany, and through all the perils of the journey they felt happy

at going once more to the country where they had once been lovers.

Fernand Montserret gave up all his positions of dignity and followed only where love led him.

It was a bright, sunny morning in July, when they left Paris, and as Marguerite entered the coach that was to convey her to the nearest town, a sigh escaped her.

“Oh, Fernand, if we had not made that promise where would we both be now.”

“Where so many others are,” answered Fernand, “where we could never see the beauties of this life again. ‘Faithful unto death,’ is the motto of your house, and faithful you have been through everything. The lordly race of Saint Reault dies out of France with the nobility, but a new race and a new France shall rise from the ruins, better and nobler for having passed through the fire burning the evil and leaving only the good, and Marguerite, the day that we shall join our hands together shall be the birth of a new era to us both.”

On, on, they went through the sunny French villages in the July sunshine, little thinking of the towns they passed through, only of Brittany, and longing with a feverish haste to get there.

The road seemed very long and dreary and every additional delay made them more impatient.

Soon Brittany was in sight, and with a thrill of joy Marguerite saw Reault nestling by the bay. As her native village appeared before her eyes, they grew dim with tears. Soon the chateau, in all its grandeur, rose before them, then her courage gave

way and laying her head on Fernand's shoulder she wept aloud, tears of joy, that the strain was over and she was coming home at last and bringing with her the one being she had loved all these years, whose happiness now was hers and who had saved her from death to be his wife.

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Several days later saw another wedding celebrated at the Chateau Saint Reault. The news had been just received of the fall and death of Robespierre, and with his death the reign of terror was ended and France was once more la Belle France of chivalry and song. And yet the reign of terror was not altogether fruitless, for it had brought these two lovers together when milder means had failed. A stern measure it was, but ardent times need violent measures and a new France awoke to glory, a France with all the blessings of liberty, equality and justice.

The chateau was in holiday aspect and the wedding day had been a fete day to the peasants.

The old banner waved from the tower with its motto, "Faithful unto death," never so true as now, while below it floated the tri-color of Republican France.

Marguerite de Chinon, *nee* de Saint Reault, became the wife of Fernand Montserret, and the peasants accepted him as their master because he was their lady's choice, and the chateau, which had been closed so long after the old master's death,

was now to be closed no longer, and all were to enjoy the park and grand old trees that had made it famous.

A crowd had collected around the door as before, and, as before, the bridegroom looked flushed and triumphant, but now instead of a pale, sorrowful bride, the lovely vision of a beautiful woman stood beside him, gay, joyful, yet with a sombre, grave joy that showed that she had not fully recovered from the terrible scenes that she had witnessed at her husband's side.

The peasants cheered and waved, as they slowly came down from the house to the lawn.

"Long live our new master!" shouted the people.

"Master no longer," said Fernand, when the cheer subsided, "but every man as one, equal; master and servant are done away with, and now you are all as free as true Bretons should be. It has not taken a moment to effect this change, but long, hard months of pain and privation to nobles and common alike, which will live long in the hearts of Frenchmen. But now it is all over, and we can reap the harvest of it, being thankful it was no worse. We were all Frenchmen, fighting on French soil, for France's freedom; but we are united at last, and Republican and Royalist are united forever. We will bury the past, and as the Royalist Saint Reaults have died out, the brave old race have gone forever; but let us here, as Royalist and Republican, join hands and give one cheer for our country and Bretagne."

The air was rent with cries of "Vive la Bretagne ! Vive la France—la belle France ! Vive la Republique !"

"And to you, my wife, my own," he continued, turning to Marguerite, "our life is but just begun. Our motto so far has held good ; let us, as man and wife, still follow it closely, and we can never know dissension ; let us, in the name of the new Republic, give up our lands and possessions and live only as free men can do, with only this chateau as our possession. And now, oh ! my Marguerite, let me only live to love you and I will be happier than any king that ever lived, this chateau as my kingdom, your will my sceptre, your love my crown, so that Fernand Montserret may ever think this day the happiest he has ever known, since it brought him the hand and heart of Marguerite de Saint Reault !"

He opened his arms and she flew to them ; and so these two, divided as they had been by men's hands, had triumphed at last, and now, united as one, under the victorious banner of the French Republic, Royalist and Republican stood together, wrapped in each other's arms, to live, love, and be "Faithful unto Death."

Saladin.

With her arms full of fresh, sweet clover leaves, Faith Annesley left the house and turned in the direction of the stables.

It was a glorious June morning in the year 1861, and, as she looked across the hills at the beautiful country she had known all her life, a feeling of oppression overwhelmed her.

She saw the white tents, glittering arms, and fluttering banners of the Army of the Potomac ; for it was war times and the great struggle between the North and South was at its height.

She pushed open the stable door, when a low whinny of recognition greeted her and she sprang forward.

“Saladin ! Saladin, see what I have brought you ! Poor fellow ; it is cruel to keep you locked up this way !”

So saying, she let down a bar and took a large bunch of clover in her hand. Saladin, a large, chestnut horse, with small limbs and beautiful,

pleading eyes, stood in a box stall, slowly eating the clover from his mistress' hand.

At this juncture a man appeared in the doorway.

"Well, Faith," he said, as he entered, "how is Saladin to-day?"

"Oh, papa, do come here?" she exclaimed. "Poor Saladin is so tired of the stable, do you think it would be safe for me to take a little canter at dusk?"

"No, my child; it is out of the question. The troops are all about us, and most of them are rough men."

"But, surely they would not harm us. We are neutral, you know."

"They might take Saladin; horses are scarce just now with the army."

"Take Saladin! Never, while I am by. Do you hear that, my pet? You don't want to be an army horse, do you?"

She stood talking to him all the while, and he, seeming to understand, turned to look at her, and then laid his big, brown head on her shoulder.

"You dear old fellow; you would never go willingly. Papa, do you think there will be a battle soon?"

"Very soon," answered Mr. Annesley; "to-morrow, or the next day at the farthest."

"How terrible!" she exclaimed, fervently, as she left the stable; and when she had gained the path leading to the house and looked around her on the lovely scene, she murmured again, "how terrible!"

"May I draw a glass of water from your well?" asked a voice close beside her, and turning in alarm she saw an officer in the road.

Both he and his horse looked tired, worn and bedraggled.

"Certainly," answered Faith with the ready hospitality of the South, "Won't you come into this summer-house? I will get you some bread and cold meat in a minute."

The soldier turned wearily into the little summer-house and sank down on the seat.

In a very short time Faith had spread a dainty repast for him, and watched him quietly as he partook of it.

Suddenly he paused.

"Why do you do all this for me," he asked, "you a Southern girl, too, I thought my very uniform would have predisposed you against me, we blue coats are so cordially hated throughout this country. Why are you an exception?"

"Would not any girl do what I have done? North or South I care not. If a man is hungry he is hungry, whether he wears a blue coat or a grey one."

"You are a brave girl, but I must not tarry here any longer. Good-bye, and may you be truly blessed for what you have done to-day."

With these words he mounted his horse and rode on.

Late that same evening a small company of Union soldiers passed the Annesley Farm. One of them tried the stable door, it yielded; it took but

a moment to unfasten Saladin, throw the halter over his neck and creep out again into the darkness.

As Mr. Annesley and Faith sat reading together, Jim, the stable boy, rushed into the house his eyes distended, his whole frame trembling with excitement.

"Oh, masser ! oh, misses ! the boys has gone and stole Saladin, he's clean gone right out of the stable."

"Out of the stable !" exclaimed Faith ; "impossible," and springing up she rushed out, followed by the others.

Mr. Annesley took the precaution to carry a lantern, and they searched until late but all in vain, Saladin was gone.

"It was your fault, Faith," began Mr. Annesley, "you should not have brought that officer here, he appropriated him of course."

"I don't believe it," said Faith, excitedly, "that man would not have done it. Besides if he knows anything about it you may be sure he will bring Saladin back."

Mr. Annesley shook his head and they returned disconsolate to the house.

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It was the morning of the great battle of Bull Run and the troops were forming.

Captain Martin who stood on a slight eminence

saw a small group of soldiers coming towards him leading Saladin.

"You have a fine horse there?" he said.

One of the men smiled.

"You think so? We had good luck; he came from one of the stables down yonder."

"And who is to ride him?"

"You, if you will do me the honor of accepting him," answered the trooper.

"It is an honor to accept such an animal, and I thank you most heartily."

"You and I should be great friends," said Martin, patting Saladin. "You will do the best for me always, won't you old fellow?"

For answer Saladin curved his neck and pawed the ground impatiently.

Martin mounted and rode into the thickest of the fight.

What a fight it was! Bullets hissed and whizzed around him, cannons roared, and the din, the noise, the confusion, sounded like a thousand thunderbolts carrying destruction in their path.

As the sun began to sink the General called Martin to him.

"Captain Martin," he said, "I am going to send you with an order that demands all your courage and all your skill. Have you a good horse?"

"None better General."

"Then take this dispatch to General Sykes at Stonebridge; tell him we are hard pressed. Go, there is no time to be lost, and beware of sharpshooters."

Martin eager to fulfill his commission shot as an arrow from the bow in the direction of the turnpike.

He had left the field and was proceeding along the road when some stray shots sounded in the distance, but he did not heed them. Presently a second volley came closer and one of the bullets, with a stinging sensation, lodged in his arm.

He, maddened with pain and struggling with a sudden faintness, rose in his stirrups giving the horse his head.

Saladin, now on his mettle bounded forward. A third volley was fired and Martin felt he was wounded again.

Then a profound silence fell upon him. Unconscious of all but the horse's hoofs beating on the road and the singing in his ears of countless far off murmurs ; sick and faint from loss of blood, powerless in everything save the instinct of clinging to the horse, he knew not whither he was going.

But Saladin knew, noble animal that he was, the moment his head was turned from the battle field a wild desire and longing to be once more at home took possession of him. With every muscle strained, his head held high, his eyes flashing fire, he was running a race with time and circumstances.

Every mile passed made the road more familiar to him, and when at last the Annesley farm rose in sight, new life seemed to animate him.

Faith and Mr. Annesley were seated in the library when the sound of a galloping reached their ears, and they rose in alarm and sprang to the door.

Saladin tore through the gate and stopped before their astonished eyes.

“Saladin !” exclaimed Faith. “Can it be possible !”

She threw her arms about his neck and wept bitterly.

“Saladin, surely, but what have we here ?” said Mr. Annesley, pointing to Martin. “Jim, for heaven’s sake, bring lights !”

The lights being brought, Martin was lifted tenderly from the saddle and the dispatch in his hand read.

“Why, papa,” exclaimed Faith, “it is the same man that was here to-day !”

“Miss Faith, chile,” said Jim, “we hab the return o’ two friends at the once.”

“How kind he was ! You were mistaken, papa ; Captain Martin came back and brought Saladin.”

“Yes, my child,” said her father, “but it is my opinion that this time it was just the other way, and Saladin brought him back, after all !”

Mme. La Marquise.

It was a gala night at court, a ball was in progress and all the beauty and gallantry of the gay capital of France were present.

It was indeed a charming sight, the ball room like a scene from fairy-land, the elegant toilets, the soft plashing of many waters that told of secluded retreats, and the music that rose and fell with a rythm at once slow and graceful.

Raoul de Subressac stood watching the scene, a look of discontent on his handsome face.

"Mme. la Marquise is late to-night," he remarked to a statesman who stood near, as he looked at every fair face that came past him. Many were lovely, many beautiful, but the one he sought was absent.

"I think there are many minds echoing your remark," answered the statesman. "Mme. la Marquise is to be envied, if by her presence she can make or mar an assemblage such as this, but are you not afraid to enter the ranks as one of her

followers? Report has it that she is so cold and disdainful and cares not the least for any one."

"So much the better Monsieur, the man who wins her regard will win much, and it will not be a passing fancy I assure you."

"Ma foi!" exclaimed the statesman, "she is indeed a singular woman, but while we have been talking she has entered, see, there she is."

A murmur of interest ran through the ball-room, and all eyes were directed to the new comer who was making her *devoir* to royalty.

Cephise, Marquise de ———, was indeed a woman calculated to excite admiration. She was tall and slight with an admirable form, and flesh white as alabaster. She was clad in a gown of palest pink which set off to perfection her dark lustrous eyes, while pale apple blossoms lay among the waves of her dark hair. She had an air about her of queenliness, of dignity, also a latent sadness, though she was called one of the gayest and happiest women of the French Court.

As she advanced slowly up the room with several escorts, Raoul de Subressac approached her.

"Ah Madame," he began, "you have caused many hearts to beat high to-night fearing you might not come. This is my dance, have you forgotten?"

"One does not forget so easily," she answered, in a low rich voice, "but let us dance."

When they paused, Raoul and his companion walked leisurely through several apartments.

"What a fairy scene this is," remarked Raoul

“and to-night it seems to me especially so, the gods have been propitious, and I can dance for once with my heart as light as my heels.”

“Then you must have a free conscience, Monsieur ; one must be perfectly happy to thoroughly enjoy anything.”

“I had not expected such an answer from your lips.”

“Why not ?”

“What can you know of anything but perfect happiness, oh, Madame, you of all women are most to be envied, the fates have been kind to you, lavishing fortune and position and all upon you, and you, like a careless butterfly flit by stopping here and there to taste the sweets, the gayest, happiest woman in all Paris.”

Mme. la Marquise was leaning against a fountain gazing into its depths and strewing rose leaves one by one on its tranquil bosom.

“The happiest woman in all Paris, ah, Monsieur, that is saying a great deal,” and she sighed.

Raoul looked at her, puzzled, there was something about this woman that he could not understand.

“What will become of us all if you, Madame, are getting sad. Tell me, are you not well, not happy ?”

Mme. la Marquise broke into a laugh, and with a gaiety, in marked contrast to her former manner, answered :

“Very well, and as happy as ever, one must not

let one's moods get the upper hand at a ball. Come let us dance, we are wasting time here."

They turned to leave the fountain when the statesman came up.

"Ah, Madame," he began, "most fortunately met. There is an old friend of yours here to-night who has been looking in vain for you."

"And his efforts are rewarded at last. I was not so very far away."

"Pardon me, Madame, you mistake, I was not referring to myself but to Mr. Edward Hebberton."

She gave a sort of gasp and turned pale, while Raoul exclaimed :

"What ! Edward Hebberton, the leading politician and public speaker ? Cleverest man England has seen for a long time, the newspapers are full of him."

"The same," answered the diplomat, "and if Madame wishes it, will I bring him here ?"

She inclined her head, a proud, queenly gesture and he left her.

In a short time he returned with the young Englishman who had made himself famous in public life.

"I hardly think we need an introduction," began Mr. Hebberton. "Ah, Madame, you have the secret of perpetual youth ; you have not changed at all after all these years. How long is it—ten, twelve years ?"

"Fourteen, Mr. Hebberton," she answered slowly.

"I hope I may have the pleasure of seeing you

often during my stay in Paris." "May I come to see you?" he asked, eagerly, as he was moving away.

Mme. la Marquise, who up to this time had been cold and as one in a dream, suddenly threw off this apathy and answered with an intensity that astonished those about her.

"Yes, come; come very soon, or won't you dine with us to-morrow evening. We shall be at home and alone."

Before he could answer, another partner claimed Mme. la Marquise, and he hesitated.

"Surely you will not stand on ceremony with me," she said, "why do you hesitate? Say, you will come."

"I will come with the greatest of pleasure," he answered, bowing.

A quick flush rose to her face, this proud woman felt she had shown him how anxious she was to see more of him. She turned to her new partner and was soon in the maze of dancers in the ball-room.

On the evening agreed upon, Mr. Hebberton wended his way to the house of the Marquise. It was with a mixture of emotions that he found himself at her door, a pleasure that he saw her once more; a pain that he saw her as she was.

As he entered the room she rose with a slow languid grace to receive him.

She was dressed in palest yellow; a huge topaz glittered on her breast.

"I am so glad to see you," she began. "Mr. Hebberton, this is my husband."

The Englishman bowed, and saw before him a dissipated *roue* with a vicious look under his heavy eyebrows.

Dinner was announced, and all through the meal conversation was somewhat stilted and unnatural, and it was not until Mme. la Marquise rose and left the room that her husband unbent. Several friends of his came in, wine flowed freely and roulette was introduced. Hebberton, disgusted, rose and went in search of his hostess.

She was seated in her boudoir, a room perfectly appointed, and as he came towards her he thought there were tears in her eyes.

"I have come to be entertained by you," he said, smiling. "Your husband has some friends; he will not miss me."

In the pause that followed, the Marquis' voice was heard loud and angry. He had evidently been drinking heavily.

Hebberton was shocked, but Mme. la Marquise understood his look and shrugged her shoulders.

"Let him be," she said, "he is quite harmless I assure you."

"Is he often like this?" he asked.

"Very often, that is his life, he could not live without it, but tell me of yourself, I have not heard a word during all these years, they say you have become famous."

"They have been very kind. My career has been successful. I plunged into public life at an early age, it was everything to me, I cared for

nothing else. I sought it, I wooed it day and night. I followed it as my only thought."

"And you have been rewarded," she said, quietly, "but tell me was it for love of public life alone that you did all this?"

"Could you understand if I told you I was trying to gain forgetfulness, that my life had been blasted without hope, that I turned to politics as another man would turn to dissipation, that I fought, I strove with no end in view. You see me here to-day famous, as you say, envied by many, but in vain, it has all been a mistake, and in the midst of it I still remain solitary and unhappy."

"And in this vein you wish to marry my husband's niece, *Mércédés*?"

"I wish to marry, yes, I like her, she is all I could wish for, and it is time I were married."

"And would you willingly offer yourself to an innocent girl, knowing there is no love for her in your heart? Would you doom her to a miserable life? No, no, it cannot be, you do not know what marriage is without love. Our French marriages are so terrible, think how unhappy she would be. Forget *Mércédés*, let me warn you ere it is too late, that one hasty step leads to years and years of remorse and misery."

"Do you think I could ever care for any other woman again?" he cried, passionately. "I loved you as woman has rarely been loved by man, till you broke my heart—threw me over for a paltry title. You were French and had to abide by the laws of your country. I was a fool to come here!

I had thought my passion had burned itself out ; but it has returned ten times stronger than before."

"Too—late !" she faltered.

"Why too late ? I love you and you are not happy—I see it ; why not spend the remainder of our lives as Nature intended we should ? We could be all in all to each other, and the past will seem like a terrible dream."

"No !" she cried. "Do not tempt me with such words. I can never be anything to you ; if I yielded now you would soon despise me as I should despise myself. Leave me, if you have nothing further to say."

"But will you not listen one moment ?"

"Not one !" she said. "Advance one step nearer and I shall go in to my husband and bring him here to confront you."

Her eyes flashed and the topaz on her breast gleamed with a sinister light. Involuntarily Heberton quailed before her. A loud shout and voices raised angrily came to them from the dining-room. Mme. la Marquise shrank back.

"That is no place for you," he said.

"Is not a wife's place beside her husband ? Forget what you have said and let us part friends."

"Mme. la Marquise, I have wronged you, forgive me and if ever a time comes when you should be free I will come to you and read my answer in your heart. You have shown me to-day that a woman can be constant, and now good-bye."

He held out his hand and she took it unable to

speak, the tears shining in her eyes and on her cheeks. Then he passed into the dining-room.

He was gone only a few moments, but when he returned to the boudoir an ashen pallor had overspread his features. La Marquise sprang forward.

“What is it? What has happened?” she cried.

“Calm yourself,” he said, “something terrible has happened. Can you prepare yourself for a great shock?”

“Anything but suspense.”

He came towards her, love and sympathy shining in his face, while his voice shook from the scene he had just been through.

“Mme. la Marquise, your husband is dead.”

Reward of Merit.

Sir Bedivere and I were old friends. It happened in this way ; during a part of one summer he and I were turned out in the same pasture, he had strained himself I believe, and I who had been there before felt bound to do the honors of it.

He and I both belonged to a young Englishman who had lately come into his fortune. Sir Bedivere was well-known throughout the country as a very promising racer. His line of ancestry went back through many Sirs this and Ladys that to King Arthur his renowned ancestor who had won the Derby ; Sir Bedivere with his small symmetrical limbs and well arched neck bid fair to outshine his illustrious grandsire, so when he came to our pasture it caused quite an excitement.

Sir Bedivere and I formed quite a friendship, though, of course, I was of far less importance.

In the first place I am not a race horse at all, but a small red cob and my name in consequence is Rufus. I never had any ancestors, or if I did I never heard of their doing anything famous.

It was my greatest pride and pleasure to be with my master whenever he was jogging about the country. What hours I would stand while he played tennis or drank afternoon tea with one of his neighbors, to be rewarded with a careless "Dear old Rufus how patient he is," as he seized the reins and I made the best of my way home.

It was my greatest ambition to be everything to him and I often wished I could win some glorious race and so win my way to my master's heart.

It was the eve of a great race. And what preparations had been made for it. All the best horses in the county were to compete and our stables had no worthier representative than Sir Bedivere.

For weeks beforehand he had been in training, the stud groom took him under his own particular care. He was raced early and late, up and down the track, walked to cool off, and he held regular levees of my master's friends who discussed every inch of his magnificent body.

At last the great day arrived. I had been saddled, ready, awaiting my master for some time before we started.

He was in the saddle at a bound. "This is the greatest day of my life," he exclaimed to a neighbor as we started.

How we flew over the ground. The keen November air blew around us, my master did not check me and I, feeling to the full all these things, particularly the excitement that was in the air, bounded on till we arrived at the race grounds.

Here, although it was early a great crowd had

gathered. Large parties were driving in on drags, grooms walked about leading horses, the little flags on the course fluttered in the breeze and the crowd of gay feathers, ribbons and flowers swayed backward and forward in an excited mass.

Suddenly the bell sounded. The Judges took their places and the horses filed out to the starting point. Among them was Sir Bedivere bearing my master's colors of crimson and white.

He held himself proudly, arching his neck and pawing the ground as if impatient to start.

The flag dropped and the horses were off at the instant. There were seven in all. Granger had the lead at the start closely followed by Mogul and Virago. Sir Bedivere was fourth, the other three straggling behind.

It was indeed a glorious sight as they thundered by on the green turf; now almost out of sight; now so close that you can feel their hot breath as they pass, every muscle strained to its utmost.

At the second post Granger dropped behind Mogul, who took the lead. Virago, who was now at her utmost speed, was gradually passed by Sir Bedivere. And so the third post was reached.

As the fourth came into view, Granger bounded forward, and at the fifth he regained his original position, while at the same time Sir Bedivere passed Mogul.

The excitement now grew intense. Sir Bedivere and Granger were running neck to neck, and seemed to be flying through the air. They passed the sixth amid cheers from the enthusiastic spec-

tators, then Granger imperceptibly gained on him.

It was a time of the greatest excitement; the horses were nearing the winning-post when I saw that Sir Bedivere was beginning to fail. He swayed and shivered, then, with a convulsive gasp, sank down upon the ground.

The other horses shot forward, and Granger won the race.

After that there was the wildest confusion, grooms running hither and thither, everyone talking at once, and soon I saw Sir Bedivere, on his feet again, being led to the stables.

Then there was a long lapse of waiting, and presently my young master came to me. He was deadly pale, and the hand that unfastened my hitching strap trembled as if with some strong emotion; then he mounted and silently rode away.

As we were leaving the racing grounds two or three other horsemen rode up and joined us. My master was moody and irritable, answering his friends' spirited remarks with short monosyllables.

We had gone for some time in this way when our paths divulged, theirs went straight on; ours was a sharp turn to the right across a bridge. My master waved an adieu and spurred me on.

The bridge was small and insecure, but what was my horror to see that it was dangerous. I stopped suddenly but my master was impatient to go on, and as he found I still resisted, he lashed me. Overcome by the pain I rushed forward blindly upon the bridge. There was a loud crashing noise, the

boards gave way and we were precipitated into the water.

For an instant I was powerless ; the boards were in splinters all about us, and I felt myself drifting down, down into fathomless depths.

Then my master leaning down exclaimed :

“ Dear old Rufus, save me if you love me, for both our sakes.”

This seemed to put new life into my veins and I plunged forward. I was stiff and cramped from long standing, but I struck out with all my force and was soon in the middle of the stream and free of the debris. By an almost superhuman effort I swam a few more strokes then fell, exhausted, on the bank.

“ Bravo, old boy !” exclaimed my master, “ I can never forget what you have done for me to-day.”

Then some of his friends came riding up, and I feeling very stiff and bruised, was taken home.

After that day a great many changes occurred at my master's. I saw with alarm that many of his horses were sold, his racing stables were broken up and he himself moved from the Hall to a small cottage near by.

I began to feel frightened, lest I, too, should have another master.

Poor Sir Bedivere was one of the last to go, and he was sent to a connection of my master's.

One day he and I went over to this cousin's place. It was a magnificent park, and Sir Bedivere was turned out to graze just as he was when I first

knew him, and my master, I fancied, looked atter him rather regretfully.

“Do what you can with Sir Bedivere,” he said to his cousin, as he was about to mount. “He is a fine horse.”

“I will do my best, but the doctor says it is an even chance if he is ever able to race again. I suppose you are pretty well sold out by this time. What horse is this? He looks like a good one; have you found a purchaser for him yet?”

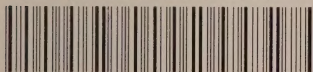
Then my master put his arms right around my neck as he answered :

“Sell this dear old fellow, never! Rufus saved my life, and I shall keep him till we have shared my last farthing together.”

And this was more to me than if I had won the greatest race in England.

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